SEPT.
15¢

EXCITING WESTERN

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

ANC

Three Complete Novelets

The Hunches OF TOMBSTONE JONES by W.C. TUTTLE

BULLET TRAIL TO BEXAR *by* NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

RIDE THE GHOST DOWN RANGER *by* JACKSON COLE

Amazing 2 for 1 Offer!

Paint Your Car with LUSTR WIPE

THE MIRACLE NEW AUTO ENAMEL THAT WIPES ON WITH A POWDER PUFF!

Fix Body and Fenders WITH DURO AUTO BODY SOLDER AT NO EXTRA COST!

BOTH
LUSTR-WIPE *New Auto Enamel* and DURO *Auto Body Solder*
AT ONE PRICE
only **$3.95**
Applicator Furnished

SEND NO MONEY MAIL COUPON NOW

ONE QUART OF LUSTR WIPE
PAINTS YOUR ENTIRE CAR
Anyone Can Do a Beautiful Job

LUSTR-WIPE is different than any auto enamel you ever tried. WORKS LIKE MAGIC! Almost ANYONE can paint his own car and get a high gloss finish that looks like a professional spray job. JUST WIPE IT ON with a powder puff. NO BRUSH, NO SPRAY, NO MASKING. NO STREAKS, NO LAPMARKS. Takes about an hour to get a brilliant "factory-finish." Dries dust-free in an hour. Goes over any enamel or lacquer.

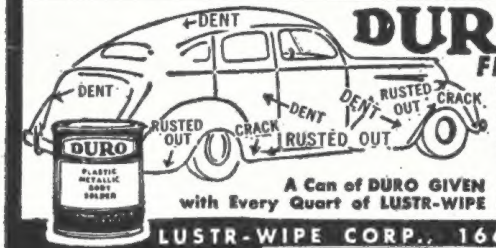
NO BRUSHING
NO SPRAYING
NO MASKING
NO STREAKS

10 POPULAR COLORS

BLACK	$3.95 Qt.
GREY (Gunmetal-Dark or Air Wing-Light)	3.95 Qt.
GREEN (Brewster Dark or Jewel-Light)	3.95 Qt.
BLUE Washington-Dark or Monticello-Light)	3.95 Qt.
RED or MAROON or SUN BEIGE (tan)	3.95 Qt.

GUARANTEED FOR 2 YEARS
Not to crack, chip, peel or fade if simple directions are followed. LUSTR-WIPE is NOT a wax or polish but a marvelous Auto Enamel.

SEND NO MONEY! ORDER TODAY!
Mail penny postcard. Then pay postman for LUSTR-WIPE plus postal charges. DURO Auto Body Solder will be included AT NO EXTRA COST. Or if you send money with order, WE pay postage.



A Can of DURO GIVEN with Every Quart of LUSTR-WIPE

DURO PLASTIC METAL BODY SOLDER

FIXES FENDERS AND BODIES LIKE NEW

DURO is foolproof—EASY TO USE. Fixes rust spots, cracked and dented fenders, body dents and rusted out holes QUICK AND EASY. Just apply right out of the can with putty-knife. Dries to metallic hardness overnight. Can be filed down smooth, sanded to the same finish as metal and painted. You never know it's there.

Fenders Rusted Out?

LUSTR-WIPE CORP., 166 W. WASHINGTON ST., CHICAGO 2, ILL.

AGENTS AND DISTRIBUTORS WANTED
Write for tried and ...sted money-making ... Also our special quantity prices.

LUSTR-WIPE CORP., 166 W. WASHINGTON, DEPT. 94, CHICAGO 2, ILL.
Please send me_____qts. of LUSTR-WIPE Auto Enamel at $3.95 Qt.
With each quart include a can of DURO Auto Body Solder AT NO EXTRA COST.

COLORS_____
☐ Send Postpaid, Full Payment of $_____(Check or M.O.) Enclosed
☐ Send C. O. D. plus Postal Charges
☐ Send Information for Agents

NAME_____
ADDRESS_____
CITY_____ZONE____STATE_____

IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of $3,000 to $10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained.* It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now.*

Over 2600 Certified Public Accountants among LaSalle alumni

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

417 South Dearborn Street, Dept. 9329-H Chicago 5, Illinois

I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

*Name*_____

*Address*_____ *City*_____

*Position*_____ *Age*_____

EXCITING WESTERN

VOL. 16, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION SEPTEMBER, 1948

THE HUNCHES OF TOMBSTONE JONES

By W. C. TUTTLE

The rollicking range detectives challenge high-graders and killers to save a widow's inheritance—and keep so busy they plumb forget they hate work! A complete novelet 11

CATCH ROPE ..... Chuck Martin 36
Tanglefoot Jim Bowen tangles with a wily battler

BULLET TRAIL TO BEXAR ..... Nels Leroy Jorgensen 46
Neither gunfire nor ambush nor treachery can stop Michael Tawn in this novelet of embattled Texans!

THE DEVIL'S BREED ..... Harry Van Demark 62
The true story of the Yeager-Black outlaw gang

KILLER, HERE I COME ..... Robert J. Hogan 66
Bud Nemo is tagged as a weakling by his townsfolk

BORN TO HANG ..... Tom Parsons 75
They called Snap Denning a vicious sheriff killer

RIDE THE GHOST DOWN, RANGER! ..... Jackson Cole 80
Navajo Raine battles the land-looters who plan a coup in Horse Canyon Country! Complete novelet!

THE COWBOY HAD A WORD FOR IT ..... Chuck Stanley 97
A tenderfoot learns some place-names of Nevada

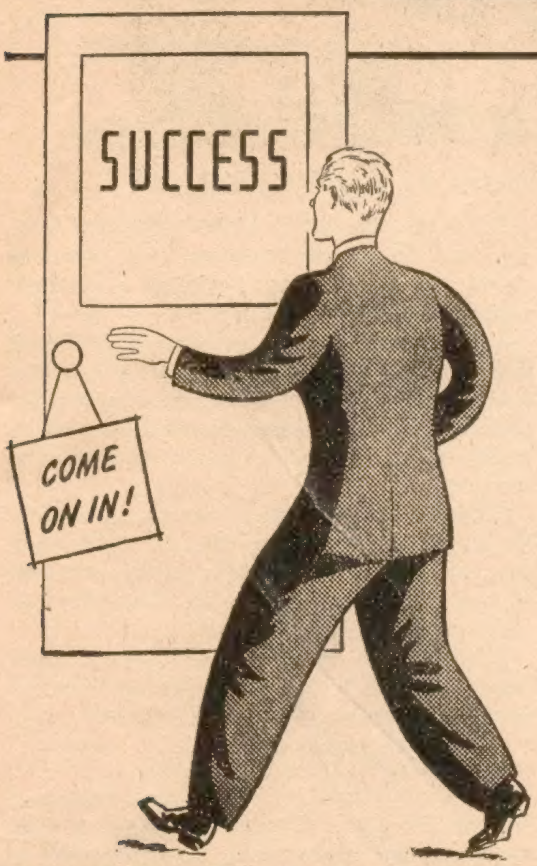
REBA RIDES ALONE ..... D. B. Newton 102
A posse at his heels, Dave Wall meets an owlhooter

TRAIL BLAZERS ..... Captain Ranger 6
A meaty department devoted to the great outdoors

Also See "Test Your Western Knowledge," on Page 61

EXCITING WESTERN published every other month and copyright, 1948, by Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), $1.80; single copies, $.15. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Entered as second class matter March 20, 1945, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. PRINTED IN U.S.A.

THERE'S NO SECRET OF SUCCESS!



THE FORMULA for success in industry and business is an open book—no secret about it at all. Promotion comes when you've *trained* yourself to handle bigger jobs, *prepared* for larger responsibilities.

Such training you'll find in a library of extremely literal books—and it's up to you to open them and keep on opening them until you've mastered their contents. You can do this in your spare time for these are the easy-to-understand texts of the International Correspondence Schools with the teacher, "built right in."

Covering more than 400 practical subjects, I. C. S. Courses have aided thousands of men and women to win better jobs and larger rewards in every business and industrial field. These thousands are the proof of the familiar saying, "Today's I. C. S. student is tomorrow's leader."

Mark and mail the coupon and you can be on the way to joining them. It brings you full information on the subject you're interested in. Act today—if you're serious about becoming a success!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3967-M, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemistry Courses
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Petroleum Refining ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Lighting Technician
- ☐ Practical Electrician

Internal Combustion Engines Courses
- ☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Forging ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Machine Shop
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Tool Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric

Railroad Courses
- ☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman

Steam Engineering Courses
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines

Textile Courses
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Rayon Weaving
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Courses
- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Arithmetic ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Motor Traffic ☐ Postal Service
- ☐ Salesmanship ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Spanish ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

Name_____ Home Address _____

City_____ State_____

Age_____ Present Position_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to_____ P.M.

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Special discount to World War II Veterans.
Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

A Department for Readers Conducted by CAPTAIN RANGER

FRIENDS, a heap of he-man, western opportunity lies waiting for you out in northern Idaho. It's country where you can tame a chunk of fertile cut-over timber land in a little creek-watered valley all your own.

And brother, when you have done that, when you have made the raw land produce needed grain and other crops you've got more than just another farm. You've got yourself a piece of America, a piece of the Frontier West. Your sweat and toil, your hopes and fears will become part and parcel of those re-captured acres. And you will be every bit as much a pioneer as the earlier generations of Americans who made our country great, and kept it free.

Modern Pioneering

It's modern pioneering, of course. Done with benefit of bulldozer to help in clearing land of stumps and a tractor perhaps to plow and cultivate the farm land crops. It's work, too. But the goal is ultimate success and an outdoor living on your private slice of the glamorous West. Believe me, it's a goal worth striving for.

You can run beef cattle, if you want to, in a modest or a more extensive way depending on your land and the size of your holdings. As a matter of fact about three-fourths of the cut-over crop land now in cultivation up there is utilized for hay crops, principally alfalfa. Livestock farming is the chief industry.

Many of the smaller farms specialize in dairying. Poultry does well and generally speaking is a paying proposition. Some of the new pioneers graze sheep, especially as a starter. Sheep help clear the land by killing brush and keeping down young sprouts, bushes and second growth.

Any of the small grains can be grown. The University of Idaho Experiment Station at Sandpoint gives the following as average crop yields: spring wheat, about 20 bushels an acre; winter wheat, 39; oats, 35 bushels; and barley, 25 bushels. That's average. Some bottom lands will produce more. Some lean soils less.

Potatoes—the famed Idaho spuds—do well. Up to 6,000 pounds an acre. And potatoes raised for seed are fast becoming a northern Idaho specialty.

For the orchardist, or the fellow experienced in handling fruit trees, apples, pears, plums and sour cherries offer an additional opportunity or a chance for farm crop diversification. Such fruits can be successfully grown over most of the area.

Climate? Well in Bonner county and that's the particular region we have in mind right now, the winters are nowhere nearly as severe as you might imagine. On the whole they are fairly moderate.

Usually there are only a few days of subzero temperature all winter. In some years there are none at all.

The Nights Are Cool

At the other extreme mid-summer temperatures rarely exceed 90 degrees. And even then the nights are always cool, generally with a pine-scented breeze sweeping down from the mountains that provide some of the finest scenery in the West right at your own back door.

The annual precipitation, an important consideration in any agricultural endeavor, averages roughly 29 inches a year. Most of this occurs during the late fall and winter months of November, December and January. And much of it falls as snow. It is the snow that provides spring moisture for the crops, and puts a "season" in the ground. However, it is not often there is more than two feet of snow on the ground at a time.

The frost-free or crop period, another important item, averages about 120 days. That somewhat the same as much of New England, or parts of upstate New York. At Sandpoint, the county seat of Bonner county the grownig season has reached as high as 161 days. But that's exceptional, and in some of the counties higher localities, particularly small valleys where air circulation is poor some light frost may occur any month of the year.

(Continued on Page 8)

THOUSANDS NOW PLAY

who never thought they could!

Thrilled by Playing

I've had my lessons just a week. I think your course is super. I was more thrilled than words can express when I found I could actually play America, The Merry Widow Waltz and the others.

*J. T., Mancelona, Mich.

Wouldn't Take $1000 for Course

The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.

*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

Shares Course With Sister

The teaching is so interesting and the pieces so beautiful I couldn't ask for anything better. I recommend your course highly. My sister shares it with me and feels the same way.

*D. E. G., Wausau, Wisc.

Finding New Joy

I am finding a new joy that I never experienced before, for I have always wanted to play, but had given up hope until I heard of your course.

*C. S. Lucien, Okla.

Plays After 2 Months

I hesitated before sending for your course because of an earlier experience I had with a course by ear from another company. I am playing pieces now I never dreamed I would play after only two months.

*E. T., Prichard, Ala.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

You, too, can play any instrument By this EASY A-B-C Method

YOU think it's difficult to learn music? That's what thousands of others have thought! Just like you, they long to play some instrument — the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorites. But they denied themselves the pleasure — because they thought it took months and years of tedious study to learn.

Learn in Spare Time at Home

And then they made an amazing discovery! They learned about a wonderful way to learn music at home—without a private teacher—without tedious study—and in a surprisingly short time. They wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the facts about this remarkable short-cut method. And the facts opened their eyes! They were amazed to find how easy it was to learn.

The result? Over 850,000 men and women have studied music at home this simple, A-B-C way. Now, all over the world, enthusiastic music-lovers are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of creating their own music. They have found the key to good times, popularity and profit.

Costs only few cents a Day

And that's what you can do, right now. Get the proof that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument — quickly, easily, in spare time at home for only a few cents a day. Never mind if you have no musical knowledge or talent. Just read the fascinating booklet and Print and Picture sample that explain all about the U. S. School method. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) Tear out the coupon now, before you turn the page. U. S. School of Music, 2949 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y. (50th year)

FREE!

Print and Picture Sample

NOTICE

Prices of our courses have not gone up. Music lessons still cost only a few cents a day. Remember, we don't teach music "by ear" or by numbers. We teach you to play by standard notes.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC,
2949 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet "How to Learn Music at Home," and your free Print and Picture Sample.

Piano	Saxophone	Clarinet	Practical Finger Control
Guitar	Trumpet, Cornet	Trombone	
Hawaiian Guitar	Reed Organ	Flute	Piccolo
Violin	Tenor Banjo	Modern Elementary Harmony	Mandolin
Piano Accordion	Ukulele		

Have you Instrument?

Name.....

(Please print)

Address.....

City.....State.....

NOTE: If you are under 16 years of age, parent must sign coupon.

SAVE 2c — STICK COUPON ON PENNY POSTCARD

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides 4 vols. $6

Inside Trade Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics and all Woodworkers. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you want—including new methods, ideas, solutions, plans, systems and money saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the apprentice and student. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. Carpenters everywhere are using these Guides as a Helping Hand to Easier Work, Better Work and Better Pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail FREE COUPON below.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a mitre box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving mensuration problems—Estimating strength of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, bungalows, etc.—How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square—How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lath—lay floors—How to paint.

AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

Mail Audels Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' free trial. If OK I will remit $1 in 7 days and $1 monthly until $6 is paid. —Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name_____

Address_____

Occupation_____

Employed by_____ PAL

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"

Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific

CRIME DETECTION!

We have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let us teach you **in your own home.** Learn Finger Printing, Firearms Indentification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. Over 800 of all American Bureaus of Identification employ I. A. S. students or graduates. We can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time. Write today, **stating age,** for "Blue Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7968 Chicago 40, Ill.

ASTHMA

Don't let coughing, sneezing, choking, recurring attacks of Bronchial Asthma ruin sleep and energy another day without trying Mendaco. This great internal medicine is tasteless and taken exactly as directed works thru the blood, thus reaching the bronchial tubes and lungs. Usually starts helping nature immediately to remove thick, sticky mucus, thus alleviating coughing and promoting freer breathing and more refreshing sleep. Get Mendaco from your druggist today. Money back guaranteed unless completely satisfied.

OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD!

TRAIN FOR A FUTURE IN

DIESEL

● Prepare for the big earning power of **Diesel Trained Men.** Start learning at home, in spare time. UEI's easy, practical training covers all phases of DIESEL engine operation, fuel systems, auxiliary equipment, repairs and maintenance. When home course is completed, you come to Chicago for actual shop practice on DIESEL MOTORS under expert instructors, at UEI's fine, modern school.

BEGIN AT ONCE—GET ALL THE FACTS FREE. WRITE TODAY!

DIESEL DIVISION **UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE**

2521 Sheffield Ave., Dept. 1098-D, Chicago 14, Illinois

TRAIL BLAZERS

(Continued from Page 6)

Now for a word of advice regarding the soils on the cut-over timber tracts. It is the soil, its physical characteristics and chemical constituents, that will make or break a farm enterprize not only in Idaho but in any agricultural area.

Northern Idaho's logged-off soils are *not* consistent. They vary widely. Some are rich, inherently fertile and productive. Once the land is cleared from such soils, the pioneer can go ahead knowing the ground he plows will raise the crops he plants.

Other soils in the area, though they once grew certain types of pine trees, are unsuited to crop production. The best, in fact the only thing to do therefore before closing any negotiations for a specific cut-over tract in the region is to check its location against a master soil survey map which will give the type of soil in that specific area together with the crops that soil is best adapted to growing.

It's a Friendly State

You can't get such a detailed map offhand. But such maps are maintained both at the University of Idaho's Experiment Station in Sandpoint and at the County Agricultural Extension Office in the same city. You can consult the maps at either office, and visit with the officials in charge. It's the smart thing to do. What's more you will find the agricultural experts in both offices glad to meet you, glad to see you, and glad to help you. Idaho's a mighty friendly State. At least we've always found it so.

As for the country itself in this part of Idaho—Hard to Beat is a trite, and considerable understatement. It's grand. Particularly for anyone who likes mountains, woods, mountain lakes, hunting, fishing, camping and such general outdoor recreation for his non-working hours.

Sandpoint lies on the shore of Lake Pend D'Oreille, a lake with a shoreline of some 125 miles and one of the largest fresh water lakes lying wholly within the U.S. The lake is a favorite spot for boating, bathing and all forms of water sport in summer. And it abounds in trout and whitefish. Attractive campsites dot the entire shoreline.

The town of Sandpoint is a modern little city of perhaps between four and five thousand persons. It is accessible. Three railroads serve it.

For the person travelling by car it is the junction of two good paved highways. U.S. Highway 95 coming down from the Canadian border at Eastport in Boundary county goes on south to Coeur d'Arlene where you can swing over to Spokane, Washington or continue on to southern Idaho.

U.S. Alternate Route 10 out of Missoula, Montana continues west from Sandpoint via Priest River into Washington, then turns south into Spokane. This road enters Idaho over the Bitterroot Range about 175 miles west of Missoula and follows the boiling, picturesque Clark Fork river to Lake Pend D'Oreille. Off to the west you can spot the peaks of the Seven Sisters mountains. There is an excellent camping and fishing spot at Trestle creek. The road then follows the northern shore of the lake to Sandpoint.

A Lake of Sapphire Blue

On this same road about 25 miles west of Sandpoint is Priest river, junction of the Pend D'Oreille and Priest rivers and gateway to the famed Priest Lake hunting, fishing and camping country.

Priest Lake is considered by many one of the most beautiful lakes not only in Idaho but in the entire West. Twenty-five miles long, fourteen miles in width at its widest spot this sapphire blue lake lies like one of Nature's gigantic gems set against a towering backdrop of dense, evergreen-forested mountains.

There are plenty of deer and bear in the forests, even a few elk and some mountain goats on the higher surrounding peaks. But even today so thick is the forest and so primitive has it remained that pushing into the woodland maze is safest only with an experienced guide.

In other words if you don't like your West still wild and primitive, and just about as it was (barring key highways) when the pioneers first found it, you had better stay out of Bonner county and northern Idaho. Or go down to Spokane, seventy-five miles away, where you can find all the hurly-burly of a modern industrial city.

And remember this, as a rule farming in cut-over areas means relatively small farms, often more or less isolated and scattered settlements. In Bonner county, Sandpoint is about the only sizable town there is.

Other things to remember are these. It takes time to get cut-over land into cash-return production. Before your land, or part of it can be prepared for crops, the brush must be cut

(Continued on Page 108)

BE A WINNER AT ANYTHING YOU TACKLE WITH PROGRESSIVE POWER
WHAM
DARLING, THAT BULLY WON'T PICK ON YOU AGAIN.
JOE YOUR NEW ENERGY AND APPEARANCE SURE DO A GOOD JOB! YOU EARNED YOUR PROMOTION.
Now ALL 5 FAMOUS JOWETT COURSES for 1 Volume 25¢
"The Jowett System is the greatest in the world!" says R. F. Kelly, Physical Director. Atlantic City
Let's Go, Pal! I'll prove I can make YOU an "ALL-AROUND" HE-MAN
Fast—or No Cost! says George F. Jowett, World's Greatest Body Builder.
Enjoy my "Progressive Power" Strength Secrets! Give Me 10 Easy Minutes a Day — Without Strain!
George F. Jowett
whom experts call Champion of Champions • World's wrestling and weight lifting champ at 17 and 19. • World's Strongest Arms • 4 times World's Perfect Body — plus other records.
I am making a drive for thousands of new friends fast—REGARDLESS OF COST!
SO GET NOW MY 5 Muscle Building COURSES (Valued at $5 each)
All In 1 Great Complete Volume
Packed With How-To-Do-It Pictures!
Now, this "get-acquainted," extremely low price of only 25c is your chance to build a body you'll be proud of! Follow Jowett's easy method of muscle building NOW!
For Only 25c
10 DAY TRIAL! Think of it—all five of these famous muscle building courses now in one picture-packed volume for only 25c. If you don't actually feel results within ONE WEEK, send it back and your money will be promptly refunded.
Photo Book of Famous Strong Men
FREE!
Photos that inspire you to might and muscle. Free with order.
How to Become a Muscular He-Man
FREE GIFT COUPON!
George F. Jowett Champion of Champions
Jowett Institute of Physical Culture 230 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, N. Y. Dept. TP-89
Dear George:—Please send by return mail, prepaid, FREE Jowett's Photo Book of Strong Men, along with all 5 Muscle Building Courses. 1. Molding a Mighty Chest. 2. Molding a Mighty Arm. 3. Molding a Mighty Grip. 4. Molding a Mighty Back. 5. Molding Mighty Legs—Now all in One Volume "How to Become a Muscular He-Man." Enclosed find 25c. NO C.O.D.'S.
NAME ..... AGE.....
(Please Print Plainly, Include Zone Number)
ADDRESS .....

IT WAS NIP AND TUCK FOR JACK UNTIL . . .

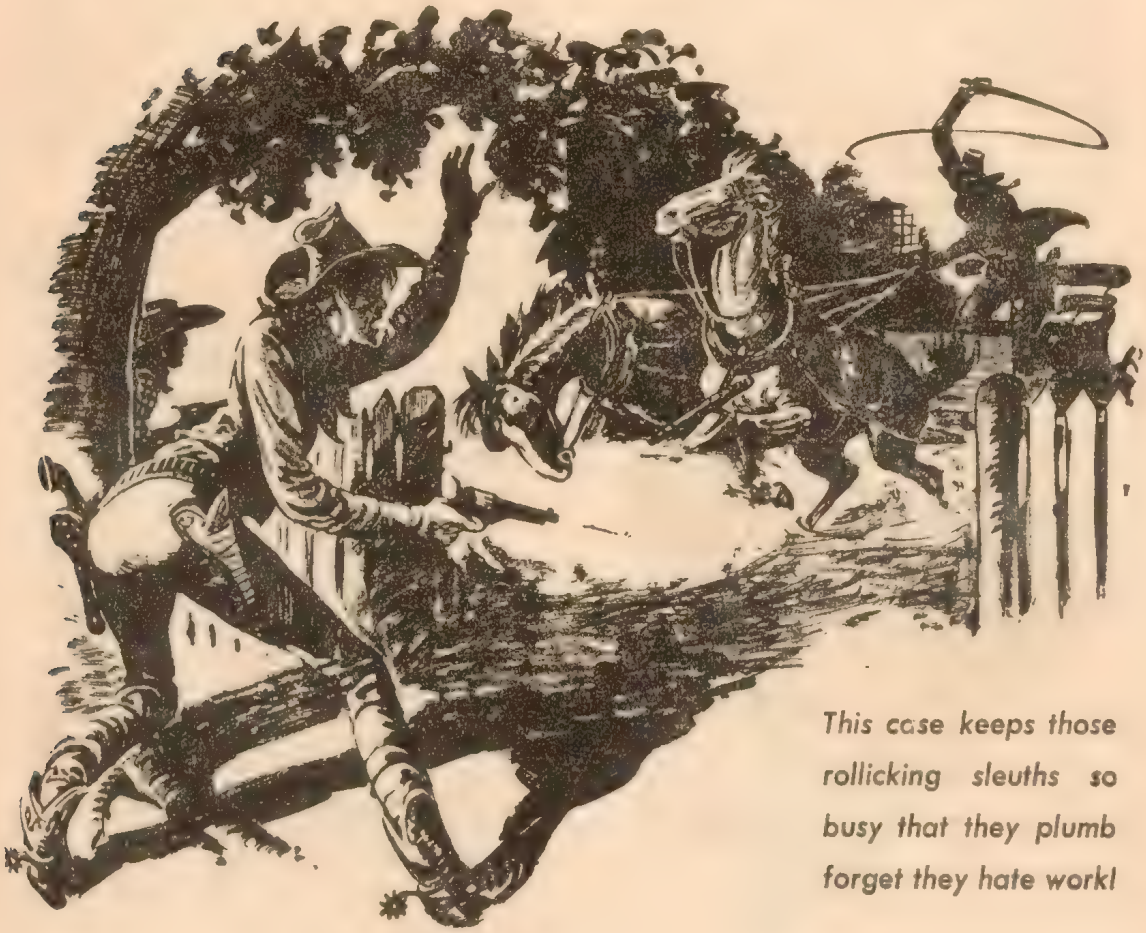
JACK ROSS AND HIS GROUP OF STATE FORESTRY STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR A CAMPSITE AT THE END OF A DAY-LONG HIKE WHEN . . .

UNLESS YOUR MEAL'S TOO FAR ALONG, WE'D LIKE YOU TO JOIN US FOR SUPPER
SOUNDS WONDERFUL! WE CAN CLEAN UP IN A FEW MINUTES
ONE HOUR LATER

SAY! I GO FOR THIS BLADE! NEVER ENJOYED A MORE REFRESHING SHAVE
THIN GILLETTES ARE MIGHTY POPULAR ON THE CAMPUS. THEY'RE REALLY KEEN AND LONG LASTING

WHEN YOU'RE OUT TO GET FAST, SMOOTH, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES . . . AND SAVE MONEY, TOO . . . USE THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING AND EASIEST-SHAVING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. WHAT'S MORE, THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR TO A "T" . . . PROTECT YOU FROM THE SMART AND SCRAPE OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
4 for 10¢

The Hunches of TOMBSTONE JONES



This case keeps those rollicking sleuths so busy that they plumb forget they hate work!

a Tombstone and Speedy novelet by

W. C. TUTTLE

CHAPTER I

Kicked Out In The Cold

JIM KEATON, gray-haired secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, sat at his desk looking over some papers. It was quiet and hot in that small office. You could hear flies buzzing up and down the windows, and one of them persisted in making a landing-strip of Keaton's nose.

Sitting just away from the desk, sprawled loosely in two of the office chairs, were "Tombstone" Jones and "Speedy" Smith. They were sober-faced, but entirely relaxed.

Tombstone Jones was at least seven feet tall in his hat and boots and, as Speedy said, if his joints were a little

closer together he would look like a bamboo pole. Tombstone had a long, thin face and inquiring eyes. He could neither read nor write, rated himself as probably one of the greatest liars the West had ever known, but he knew a lot of things that were never taught in books.

Speedy Smith was a physical replica of Tombstone Jones, except for height. Speedy was five-feet-seven, weighed a hundred pounds in first-class condition, and tried, without any visible success, to grow a mustache.

Jim Keaton looked them over, swallowed quickly and returned to his reading. These men were two of his range detectives—believe it or not.

TOMBSTONE JONES

And the strange part of it was the fact that they had broken some tough cases. Through ignorance and good luck, certainly, but the fact still remained that they had made good. "Irresponsible" was Jim Keaton's one-word description of them. They neglected to report to the office, after a case was closed, and sometimes disappeared for weeks, while Jim Keaton tore his remaining hair and swore he would fire them on sight. They were back now, calmly waiting for him to assign them to another case. Finally Jim Keaton shoved the papers aside and said wearily:

"I wish somebody could explain to you two galoots that the business of the Association is important."

"Can't do it yoreself, huh?" asked Tombstone.

"It doesn't seem like it. I even sent circular telegrams to the office of every sheriff in the country, asking about you two."

"Round ones, huh?" queried Tombstone soberly. "I'd like to see one. All I've seen are kinda square, Jim."

The secretary paid no attention.

"I WIRED," he continued soberly, "'If you know the whereabouts of Tombstone Jones and Speedy Smith please advise.' One sheriff wired, 'If I knew their whereabouts, I wouldn't wait to ask your advice.'"

"I think I know who he is, Jim," said Speedy. "Can't take a joke."

"Was it a joke?" asked Keaton.

"A pretty good'n, too, Jim." Speedy grinned. "It was down in Burnt Fork. Yuh see, they had a smallpox scare down there. Me and Tombstone and another half-witted cowpoke got another waddy who was too drunk to care what happened, and we painted iodine spots all over his face and hands, and planted him in the biggest saloon in the town. Then this cowpoke companion of ours sent for the doctor. Well, to make a long story kinda painful, the Doc was a stubborn old rascal, and he made every danged man and female in that place git vaccinated right there. Took all night to do the job, too. He charged 'em a dollar a head for the job."

"Yeah"—Tombstone grinned—"and next day Speedy circ'lated the report that it wasn't smallpox juice he'd used, but that he'd made a mistake and inoculated all of 'em with black-leg cure."

"What happened then?" asked Jim Keaton.

"We dunno," sighed Speedy, "'cause we'd done pulled out."

Jim Keaton shook his head sadly. "You two give the Association a bad name, Speedy. I'm sorry, but I haven't another job lined up right now, so I can't keep you on the payroll."

"Yuh mean, we're fired agin?" choked Tombstone. "Aw, Jim, yuh can't mean that! After all we've done—it ain't human. Our lifework nipped in the bud,

as yuh might say. Why, it—it's like takin' the wings away from a bird."

"I'm sorry," said Keaton soberly.

"Kicked out in the cold," said Speedy hoarsely.

"It is now a hundred and eight in the shade," said Keaton.

"I don't care about that," said Speedy. "It gave me a cold chill, jist thinkin' of goin' back punchin' dogies at forty a month. Jim, old pardner, ain't there somethin'?"

"Anythin'—but hard work, Jim," added Tombstone.

Jim Keaton looked at them thoughtfully, finally picked up a letter and studied it carefully.

"Tombstone Jones," he said quietly, "what do you know about high-grading?"

"Now that yuh come right out and ask me, with no beatin' around the bush, what *do* I?" asked Tombstone.

"I thought so," said Keaton.

"What is it?" asked Tombstone.

"Stealing rich ore."

"Or what?" asked Tombstone. "Finish the sentence."

"Speedy," said Keaton, "has he always been that dumb?"

"Well, he's leadin' up to it," replied Speedy soberly.

"I've got a letter here from a man I've known quite a long time," said Keaton. "He belonged to the Association long before I came here to work, but he sold out his cattle interests, and went into mining. He owns a mighty good mine, and he writes me that he's being stolen blind by high-graders. He knows that we can't use our men for that sort of work, but he thought maybe I might know a good man, who wasn't too busy."

"What salary does he pay?" asked Speedy.

"That is between you and Hardrock Haggarty."

"Yuh know," remarked Tombstone thoughtfully, "me and Speedy have almost decidéd to quit the Association and go into business for ourselves."

"Free-lance detecting?" asked Keaton.

"Free—nothin'! I'll bet we can make a million."

"You have my blessing," said Keaton.

He handed the letter to Speedy and leaned back in his chair.

"This might be a good place to start your experiment," he said. "Read the letter and think it over, Speedy. Later, if you have a lot of time on your hands, you might let me know how you came out on the deal."

Tombstone and Speedy walked out of the office, went up the street, and sat down in front of a store, where Speedy examined the letter closely.

"This letter," he told Tombstone, "is three weeks old."

"How can yuh tell?" asked Tombstone dumbly.

Speedy sighed and pocketed the letter. "Let's go find a map," he said. "I'd like to know where Sunset Wells is located, before we start. . . ."

SPEEDY SMITH

A man told Tombstone just how to get to Sunset Wells. There was no use going miles out of the way. The man was convincing. He drew a map, but he neglected to add several other roads, which they were not supposed to follow.

It was now after midnight, and here they were, out on a lonely road in the desert hills, hungry, horses leg-weary—and no place in sight. "If we only knowed where the North Star is, mebbe we'd go some place," Tombstone said.

"I'd trade the North Star for Sunset Wells," said Speedy.

Then they came to the end of the road—and a battered old gate. They pulled up and considered things in the weak starlight. They could see the silhouette of an old barn, part of a house, hidden in the cottonwoods, but no sign of a light.

"Lemme light a match and look at that map again," Tombstone said.

"If you look at that map again, I'll cut yore throat," declared Speedy. "Every time yuh've looked at it, we've changed directions. We're goin' over to that house and wake up somebody who can tell us where we are."

They swung open the old gate and rode up to the house, but there was no answer to their banging on the door. Evidently there was no one at home, because they banged on the front door and on the back door.

"I'm through wanderin' around like a goose in a storm," Speedy said. "We'll sleep in the stable—and I don't care who knows it. C'mon, we'll feed the hosses in the corral and dig a bed in the hay."

They took hay from a manger and dumped it into the corral for their horses, working in the dark, because they couldn't find a lantern, then climbed up into the hay-loft, which was about a quarter filled with wild hay. The only light was from a three-foot-square hay-window at the back, which gave them the illumination of about two stars.

Tombstone sat down to pull off his boots, went away from there fast and landed on his hands and knees on the loose boards.

"What's eatin' yuh?" Speedy asked quickly.

"Did I set on you?" whispered Tombstone huskily.

"Yuh shore didn't," replied Speedy.

"Well, I—I sat on somebody," declared Tombstone in a husky voice, tinged with fear. "I shore did! It had legs."

"Hold still—I'll light a match," said Speedy.

"Look out for the hay," warned Tombstone.

The match flared up, disclosing a rather young man hunched on the hay, his hands and feet tied. He had blond hair and a fair skin, although it was streaked with grime. The match flickered out. The young man remained mum.

"Anythin' can happen, when we take a short-cut, Tombstone," Speedy said.

"Most always does, too. Who are you, feller?"

"Are you speaking to me?" asked the young man huskily.

"As long as yuh put it that way—yeah," said Tombstone. "We ain't nosy, yuh understand, but under the circumstances we'd naturally be curious."

"I am Morris Frank," said the young man wearily. "I handle ladies' ready-to-wear."

"You—uh—hu-u-uh?" gasped Tombstone. "Huh—how do yuh wear 'em?"

"Sh-h-h-h!" hissed Speedy. "I hear voices. Set still."

SPEEDY crawled over the hay to the left window. There were voices up at the house.

"How'd I know who they was?" he heard a man say. "They hammered on the door, but I wouldn't let anybody in, and they went away."

There was a low-voiced argument, in which profanity played a big part, and then he heard the men coming toward the stable. Speedy crawled back swiftly. Tombstone had taken the ropes off the young man. Several men came into the stable, arguing.

"That was a fine mistake to make!" one of them said.

"Aw, simmer down!" snapped a disgruntled voice. "That's all I've heard for the last hour. How'd we know that this'n was too old? Nobody told us what to look for. We took what showed up."

"Yeah, that's right. But what's to be done with him?"

"Take him out to a road to Sunset Wells and turn him loose."

"Yea-a-ah?" snorted a voice. "Yuh're crazy! This feller *saw* us. Mebbe you hanker for a rope, but I don't. He'd go straight to the sheriff, that feller would, and you know it."

"Well, what do yuh want to do—sink him in a prospect hole?"

"Mebbe we better."

"Who is he, and where's he from?"

"We never asked him. Where's the lantern, Moose?"

"Aw, I took it up to the house."

"Wait a minute," said one of the men. "We can't go off half-cocked on this deal. Mebbe we better talk it over at the house. I wish I knowed who came here tonight. I don't like it."

"Aw, they pulled out right away. For-

Tombstone flung the rock and both barrels of the shotgun went off

get 'em. We'll go up to the house and have some coffee. C'mon."

Tombstone relaxed, but Speedy, sprawled close to the loft ladder heard a man whisper hoarsely:

"Cuidado! Caballos!" (Look out! Horses!)

They had discovered the two strange horses in the corral. There was no more conversation, but Speedy knew that the men had not gone to the house. He slid quickly back to Tombstone and whispered:

"Don't talk! They've found our hosses!"

CHAPTER II

Anything Can Happen

A DOOR banged at the house, but Tombstone and Speedy knew that it was only a decoy. Speedy slid quietly back to the loft window. A man was moved in against the wall, and Speedy window, which was nothing more than a square hole in the end of the stable. As Speedy peered down at him, the man moved in against the wall, and speedy saw the starlight glint on the gun in his hand.

Speedy turned and began searching for some sort of a weapon. In the dark, and against the wall his hands came in contact with a wooden box. It was not a big box, but quite heavy, and the lid was tightly nailed. He slid the box back to the hay hole and peered over the edge. The man was straight below him, standing with his back against the wall.

Slowly the box was eased over the edge, sliding noiselessly on the hay. Taking careful aim, Speedy let the box fall. It was not over eight or ten feet to the man's head, and the aim was perfect. Man and box went to earth together, and neither of them moved.

"Come on!" hissed Speedy, and all three of them crawled over the hay.

"Hang by yore hands and drop," whispered Speedy. "It won't hurt yuh. C'mon."

The three men thudded to earth together, and Tombstone, who didn't have far to fall, grabbed the blond young man and held him from going backward across the yard. Speedy's victim slept peacefully. To their right was an old fence, grown over with brush, and Speedy led the way into the heavy shadows, where they went flat, when a man's voice broke the stillness.

"All right, you fellers in the hay loft!" he yelled. "We know yuh're up there. C'mon down and keep yore hands in the air!"

"Is there somebody else up there?" asked Tombstone in a whisper, but no one answered him, because a man came creeping around a corner of the stable and found his sleeping companion.

"He-e-ey!" he yelled. "C'mere, you fellers!"

Two other men came running. Tombstone, Speedy and the young man eased closed to the brush. One of the men swore bitterly, while the others picked up the unconscious man. One of them lighted a match, shielded it for a moment in his hands, and gasped:

"Look! They hit Moose on the head with fifty pounds of dynamite!"

"Where did they get dynamite?"

"It was up there in the loft. Don't move it around, yuh fool! It's a wonder it didn't go off! Get Moose up to the house—I'll watch the corral. It's a cinch they got out of the hay loft."

"If they get them hosses, we're stuck."

"They won't get 'em—not as long as I'm alive."

The men disappeared around the corner, carrying their burden, and Tombstone relaxed audibly.

"I wish I'd stayed home," said the young man wearily.

"Yeah, that might have simplified things," whispered Speedy.

"Dad said I never knew when I was well off."

"Did he expect yuh to get into this mess?" asked Tombstone.

"Well, he said if there was any chance, I'd get into a mess."

"It's habit-formin'," said Speedy. "You stay here, while me and Tombstone slide out and figger a way out of it. And when I tell yuh to stay here, remember yore pa's warnin', or yuh might get a forty-five bullet in yore ribs. These *pelicanos* play for keeps, and they don't care who they hurt. See what I mean?"

"I'll stay here, Mr. Speedy."

Speedy found a way through the fence, while Tombstone snaked his way back to the corner of the stable. There was no desperate haste to get their

horses. It would be a long time before daylight, so they could take their time.

There was a light in the ranchhouse, but the window was covered with a newspaper.

Tied to the front porch rail were three horses, and it was a simple matter for Speedy to untie them and slowly work them away from the house, taking them the opposite way from the corral. He tied them in the heavy shadows of a clump of cottonwoods, and was on his way back, circling wide of the house, when the man in the house discovered their loss.

"He-e-ey!" he yelled. "Our hosses are gone!"

He ran off the porch and headed for the stable, still yelling. The guard at the corral ran to meet him, and they vied with each other in the profane art of maledictions. Then they both ran for the house.

TOMBSTONE went through the corral fence, grabbed the bridles off the saddle-horns, bridled their two horses, yanked up the cinches, and swiftly led the two horses outside.

Speedy joined him, panting from his run.

"Get the kid on a hoss," he said, "while I circle and pick up one of the hosses I hid out there. I'll meet yuh on the road."

The kid was afraid of a horse, but Tombstone fairly shoved him into the saddle.

"Grab them reins!" snapped Tombstone. "Get a grip on that saddle-horn and let the hoss run. I'll be with yuh!"

Speedy's horse didn't need any instructions. When Tombstone's bronc headed for that gate, running at top speed, the other horse was right on his heels, the kid clinging to the horn with both hands. A man ran out of the house, and they heard the rattling report of a six-shooter, as he threw lead at them, but a running target in the dark makes for difficult shooting. Speedy came pounding along behind them, but they slowed down soon after leaving the ranch. There was no danger of pursuit.

"Well, we outsmarted 'em that time," chuckled Tombstone.

"You are very resourceful," panted the kid. "I am still at a loss to know what this is all about. Did they mean that they were going to kill me?"

"Pardner," said Speedy, "suppose yuh tell us what happened to yuh—and why."

"I do not know why, Mr. Speedy. Honestly, I have no idea. I got off the train last night at a town called Turquoise Bend, and had started to find a hotel when three men met me. They said I was to go with them. They were very insistent. They put me in what they called a buckboard, and we drove most of the night. Then they tied me up in that stable, gave me something to eat. It was not very palatable, I can assure you. That is the whole story."

"Uh-huh," grunted Tombstone. "Just what was yuh doin' in Turquoise Bend? Er—what did yuh say yore name is, pardner?"

"I am Morris Frank, as I told you, and I am twenty-two."

"The name is all right, but don't brag on the caliber."

"This," said Morris, "is my first selling venture."

"That kinda makes me fight my hat. Sellin' venture?"

"Yes. You see, my father is a manufacturer, and I have always wanted to go on the road. Finally my father relented, with the provision that I make the smaller towns. See what I mean?"

"You *make* towns, huh?" grunted Tombstone. "That's wonderful. Yuh know I've allus wondered how they got a start in life."

"I don't believe I understand," said Morris.

"That puts yuh right in our class," declared Speedy.

They reached another road and turned left.

"Do yuh think this is the right road, Speedy?" Tombstone said.

"It must be. It's the only one we ain't never been on."

A mile further on disclosed one light ahead, which turned out to be a saloon. There was a small store across the road, but it was closed. Speedy advised caution.

"Yuh see, we don't know folks around here, and they might all be related to that gang at the ranch. You pull up over there by the store, and I'll go in and ask 'em where-at is Sunset Wells."

"That is where I was going," said Morris. "Maybe we can all go together."

"Yeah," said Speedy drily. "I think yuh got with the right people."

Tombstone and Morris pulled up near

the little store, where a lone cottonwood threw them in heavy shadow, while Speedy dismounted at the saloon and went in. Five men were hunched over a poker table, and the bartender slumped in a chair, watching the play.

They all looked up as Speedy's spurs rattled across the threshold, and he came into the small saloon.

"Howdy, pilgrim," greeted one of the men at the table.

"Hyah." Speedy grinned. "Does any of yuh know where-at is the road to Sunset Wells?"

"Yeah," replied the man slowly, examining his cards. He threw them into the discard, and turned to Speedy. "Yuh go straight down this road about two miles, to where she bends real hard to the left. This road goes straight on, but it ain't used much. You keep on the good road, and you'll eventually come to Sunset Wells. It's about twenty miles."

"Somebody," growled a player, "shore measured it with a rubber tape—and stretched her tight. I've been over that . . . Oh-oh!"

Two masked men had silently entered the saloon doorway, and their two guns were pointing right at Speedy's back.

"Keep yore hands up and turn slow, yuh hoss-thief!" one of them said sharply.

"And the rest of yuh freeze jist like yuh are," added the other masked man.

SPEEDY turned slow, his hands shoulder-high. For several moments there was no conversation. Then one of the men said:

"Mebbe we better give it to him right here."

"Wait a minute, blast yuh!" snapped a man at the table. "We're right in line with yuh. Hold it, will yuh?"

"That's right — hold it!" snapped Tombstone's voice, as he stepped inside the doorway. "Don't turn, you masqueraders! Drop them guns, or I'll unj'int yore spines!"

The two guns clattered to the floor, and Speedy quickly swept them up.

"Didja get the directions, Speedy?" Tombstone said.

"Yeah—we're all set."

"Well, what are we waitin' for? C'mon!"

They backed out, and went running across the street. They saw the two masked men run out toward the little hitchrack, but their horses were drifting up the street, the bridles still tied to the hitchrack.

"What happened?" Morris said.

"Nothin', son," replied Tombstone. "Let's drift."

They rode out of town, and Tombstone said:

"I seen 'em come in. It didn't take 'em long to find their hosses, seems like. They tied up with their bridle reins, so I slipped the bridles loose and let the broncs drift. After all, we can't let 'em foller us all over the country."

"No. Yuh done all right, Tombstone. They accused me of stealin' that hoss, and they was goin' to cut down on me right there."

"Do you mean that those men were going to kill you, Mr. Speedy?" asked Morris.

"Oh, shore," replied Speedy.

"Well, isn't—I mean, isn't life worth anything here?"

"Only yore own, son," said Tombstone.

"I had no idea!"

"It's prob'ly a safe mental condition," remarked Speedy.

"How far did the man say it is to Sunset Wells?" asked Tombstone.

"Twenty miles."

"That far? Gosh, didn't yuh ask him about a short-cut?"

"No, I didn't—'cause I'd like to get there for breakfast."

CHAPTER III

A Matter Of Heirs

IT was about noon next day, when Tombstone and Speedy ate a big breakfast, and were taking their ease in front of the one hotel in Sunset Wells. There was nothing ornate nor elaborate about the Sunset House, but there was a good porch for loafing in the shade.

Almost directly across the street was the Oasis, the one big saloon in the country. On the right-hand side of the saloon was a narrow alley, and opposite this alley and across the wooden sidewalk was the hitchrack for the patrons of the Oasis.

Sitting on the top pole of this rack was a long, lean, hungry-looking cow-

poke, his battered hat yanked down over one eye. He was undeniably as drunk as the proverbial boiled owl. At times he had difficulty in maintaining his precarious perch. It seemed to Tombstone and Speedy that everyone gave this inebriated gent a wide berth.

He had his back to the alley, and did not see the man coming toward him. This man was at least six feet, six inches tall, and would weigh well over two hundred pounds.

The man was carrying a coiled rope, which he shook into a sizable loop. Speedy chuckled, turned his head, and saw the hotel proprietor in the doorway. The big man swung the loop just once, made a perfect cast and dropped that loop around the shoulders and arms of his unsuspecting victim. Then he deliberately jerked the man over backwards off the hitchrack, came in down the tight rope, took the man's gun from his holster and yanked him to his feet.

The cowpoke's legs were rubbery, as the big man started him on his way to the jail. The cowpoke objected verbally, but the big man merely jerked him ahead.

"A job well done," commented Tombstone. "'Course, he could have shot him off the hitchrack, but that's allus messy."

The hotel man leaned against a post and filled his pipe.

"That is Shine McCord," he said.

"Which one?" asked Tombstone.

"The drunk. The other is Sloppy Saunders, the deputy sheriff."

"Lookin' at it as a innocent bystander," remarked Tombstone, "I'd say that Shine McCord is a badman."

"Shine's a funny person," said the hotel man. "Did yuh ever hear of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde?"

"Shucks, yeah!" exclaimed Tombstone. "I used to work for Hyde, up in Colorado. Doc used to take care of his stock. Good hoss doctor, Doc was. Have yuh heard from 'em lately?"

"No, I ain't," replied the hotel man thoughtfully. "This Shine McCord is two, three men, if yuh know what I mean."

"I wouldn't worry too much about it," said Tombstone. "I knew a feller up in Wyomin' who had the same thing. Saw three of everythin' he looked at. Took him a week to figger out that the one in the middle wasn't there. After he got that cleared up he got himself

Taking careful aim, Speedy let the box fall—and his aim was perfect

into a gun-fight with a feller. Shot the one on the right three times, but nothin' happened."

"I see," murmured the hotel man quietly. "So that's how he proved that the one on the left was the only one, eh?"

"He never said," sighed Tombstone. "Yuh see, the other feller was shootin', too."

"What I meant was this," explained the hotel man. "Shine is a queer sort of rooster. One time he'll get drunk and want to sing. The next time he wants to dance and have fun, but mebbe the next time he gets mean and wants to make trouble. Yuh never can tell what he'll do."

"Pers'nally," said Speedy, "I'm a one-idea man. When I git drunk, somebody slaps my ears down. Who is this Shine McCord?"

"Well, for one thing, he's a nephew of the late Hardrock Haggarty, the feller who owned the Blarney Stone Mine."

"Late?" queried Tombstone quickly.

"Dead," said the hotel man. "Buried him a week ago. Died of a heart attack, the doctor said. Worth a lot of money, too."

"Dead, huh?" grunted Tombstone. "Hardrock Haggarty. Well, well!"

"Did you fellers know him?"

"Only by name," sighed Speedy.

"Quite a feller," remarked the hotel man. "He had a son named Frank, who married the daughter of a sheepman. Old Hardrock hated sheep, and he cut the kid off without a dime. Frank died a couple years ago, leavin' a widder and a son. I dunno much about it, except what I've heard. The kid's five now, they say.

"It's kind of a funny deal, the sheriff was tellin' me. It seems that Bob Smalley, a lawyer here, after Haggarty died, sent the widder of Frank a letter, enclosin' a ticket and some money. He wanted her to come here, but nobody knows why. Well, she's here, and Smalley is dead—and nobody knows what to do about her. She's pretty, too, and the kid is a dinger. They're livin' at Haggarty's house."

SPEEDY moved a little uneasily.

"This here Smalley person," he said, "is dead, yuh say?"

"He was shot in his office the day Haggarty was buried. His safe was open, but didn't seem to have been burgled."

"Funny things happen," said Speedy.

"Speakin' of funny things happenin'," remarked the hotel man, "where on earth did that yaller-haired feller come from—the one who came with you this mornin'?"

"I dunno where he uprooted from," replied Tombstone. "He kinda throwed in with us, over on the other side of the hills. Says he makes small towns."

"Makes small towns?"

"That's what he said. He also said he fixed up women, so they'd be ready to wear. Jist between me and you, pardner, I think he's sort of a blank ca'tridge."

"I thought so myself. After you fellers went up to yore room, he de-manded a bath. Said he can't sleep without it. I told him that the only bathtub in the town was in the barber shop, but that don't open until eight o'clock. I said he might try out the waterin' trough in front of the livery stable, and he done it. Came back with his hair full of alfalfa seeds."

"He's a likable feller," said Speedy.

"Yeah, he is, at that. Says he's got to go back to Turquoise Bend to git his samples."

"Samples?" asked Speedy. "Samples of what?"

"He didn't say what kind."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Tombstone. "Do you suppose that feller is a drummer?"

"Yeah," admitted the hotel man, "he could be."

"Sellin' small towns out of a valise?" asked Speedy.

"Here comes Sloppy Saunders," said the hotel man. "Mebbe he can tell us more about Shine McCord."

Deputy "Sloppy" Saunders sat down, sighed deeply, looked Tombstone and Speedy over with rather a jaundiced eye, and nodded to the hotel man. It was too hot for immediate conversation. After a lapse of time Speedy said:

"Ain't it a novelty—officers ropin' badmen?"

"Shine ain't bad," denied Sloppy. "He's just unpredictable."

"That's what I was tellin' the boys," said the hotel man.

"He's a-settin' in a cell, cryin' his eyes out."

"Sorry about the whole thing, huh?" queried Tombstone.

"Sorry he let me sneak up behind him. He's sensitive. So am I."

"Would he have shot yuh, Sloppy?" asked the hotel man.

"Said he would."

"Saunders, I'd like to have yuh meet Jones and Smith."

"Howdy, gents." Sloppy nodded. "I ought to say that I'm glad to meet yuh, but I dunno what for. It's too hot to be genteel."

"Anythin' new on the Haggarty thing, Sloppy?" asked the hotel man.

The deputy shook his head. "Mrs. Haggarty and the kid are down at Hardrock's house, just settin', waitin'. Nobody can tell 'em why Bob Smalley sent for 'em. If Hardrock left a will, nobody knows where it is. I reckon it'll have to go to court."

"Who has first claim on the property?" asked Speedy.

The deputy shrugged. "*Quien sabe?* Shine McCord is his nephew, Mrs. Frank Haggarty is his daughter-in-law, and the kid is his grandson. Old Hardrock wouldn't give Shine McCord the sleeves out of a second-hand vest, and he disowned Frank for marryin' that girl. Take yore choice, gents."

"If Shine McCord was the only livin' relate—he'd get it, huh?" remarked Tombstone. "Even if Hardrock hated him?"

"The law," sighed Sloppy, "don't recognize hate."

Morris Frank came out onto the porch. The young man looked rather seedy, with his wrinkled suit, soiled shirt, no hat, and dusty shoes, but he still had a smile.

"Hyah, Morris," Speedy said. "Didja sleep good?"

"Thank you, no," replied Morris. "Something kept biting me. I'm a mass of red welts."

The other three men looked at the hotel man, who said: "Don't say it."

Sloppy grinned slowly. "I wasn't sayin' anythin', Mort," he said, "but that last bedbug powder salesman must have sold yuh some brick dust."

"It was kinda red," admitted Mort Young, the hotel proprietor. "Yuh know, some day I'm goin' to kill a drummer."

"That reminds me," said Morris. "My sample trunks are all in Turquoise Bend. Does anyone here handle ladies' ready-to-wear?"

"Yuh might explain that last re-mark," said Sloppy. "We don't wear 'em—not that I've ever heard about."

"I mean . . . Well, of all things! I sell ready-made dresses and lingerie for ladies."

"Oh, that! No, I don't reckon we've got a store like that. Yuh can buy overalls and calico at the general store."

"My father told me I'd find towns like this, but I didn't believe him," sighed Morris sadly. "Maybe those men did me a favor, when they kidnaped me in Turquoise Bend."

SLOPPY Saunders stared at Morris for several moments.

"When they kidnaped yuh?" he asked slowly. "When did that happen?"

"Let me see. I came to Turquoise Bend Tuesday night. They took me to a stable. The next night these two gentlemen here found me. That was last night, I believe. In fact, I'm confused. If you do not mind, I shall go and find a place to eat breakfast. I'm famished, really."

Morris went off the porch and headed down the street. Sloppy looked quizzically at Tombstone and said:

"Go ahead and talk, Jones."

"Aw, it wasn't anythin'," said Tombstone soberly. "Me and Speedy got lost. We found a ranchhouse, which we thought was empty, and hammered on the doors, but nobody answered, so we climbed up into the hay loft to sleep. That's where we found the kid, all tied up for shipment. He didn't know why he was there.

"Anyway, in a little while some men came, discovered our hosses in the corral, and made a guess that we're in the loft. There was some indication that we wasn't goin' away from there, till we proved our honesty, et cettery. One man guarded the hay hole, him down on the ground, and Speedy dropped a heavy box on his head. It was fifty pounds of dynamite, but we didn't know it then.

"Well, we outsmarted 'em and got away with our own hosses and one of theirs. They caught us in a little place a few miles down the road, and stuck Speedy up in the saloon. But I moved in behind them and made 'em imitate a couple *sagueros.* Then we pulled out for Sunset Wells."

"Well, I'll be a chum to a chuckwalla!" exclaimed Sloppy. "That story sounds tall, pardner. Where's the extra hoss yuh took?"

"Headin' home, I reckon. We tied up the reins and he went back."

"Hm-m-m-m!" said the deputy. "What sort of a place was this—I mean, where yuh found the saloon?"

"Had a store across the street and a couple cottonwoods."

"Uh-huh. That sounds like . . . Was it a little saloon, with a bar on the right-hand side, and a pitcher of a girl stoopin' down over a water-hole?"

"Yeah," said Speedy, "and her about ninety per cent out of clothes. I noticed her in particular. Awful purty. I kinda wondered if she was lookin' for fish."

"That's Slim Devore's place!" exclaimed the deputy. "How far from that was the ranch where yuh found the blond kid?"

"Oh, mebbe three, four miles."

"Hm-m-m-m!"

"Do yuh allus hum thataway?" asked Tombstone.

"Could yuh identify any of the men?"

"Well," said Speedy, "the two we saw wasn't much alike. One wore a blue and white mask and the other had a black one on."

"Oh, they were masked, eh? That's different."

"The difference was noticeable," said Speedy. "For some reason they acted mad about it, but I thought it was funny."

"What was funny about it?" asked the deputy.

"Masked men accusin' me of hoss-stealin'."

"Yuh know," said Tombstone brightly, "it might have been the sheriff and deputy, so ashamed that they wouldn't show their faces. Or is that in yore territory, Saunders?"

"No, that's in another county, Jones—and I don't believe it was the sheriff and deputy. They wouldn't need to be ashamed."

"If they kidnaped that yaller-haired kid, they should have been ashamed."

"Who said the sheriff and deputy done that?" asked Sloppy.

"Now, we're right back where we started," sighed Speedy.

"I've got to tell this story to Hank Adams," declared Sloppy, and went back down the street.

"Hank's the sheriff," explained Mort. "He's very serious."

"Sloppy ain't what I'd call tre-men-dously funny," said Speedy.

CHAPTER IV

A Detective Knows All

THE hotel man went back to his job. Tombstone stretched his long legs and began manufacturing a cigarette.

"Well, I don't think we've done too well, so far," Speedy said. "We come all the way over here to go to work for a dead man. Nobody left to hire us."

"Ort to be somebody that could use a good detective," remarked Tombstone. "Sa-a-ay! Maybe Morris could hire us. He'd prob'ly like to know who kidnaped him."

"Morris is only interested in sellin' somethin'. At least, I don't think he cares who kidnaped him. Well, here comes Sloppy and the sheriff, seekin' information from the two wise men."

Hank Adams, the sheriff, was a big, stolid sort of a person, with huge eyebrows and a walrus mustache. He merely grunted when introduced to Tombstone and Speedy, sat down ponderously and placed his hat on his lap.

"Sloppy was tellin' me a queer tale about you two," he said. "Mind if I ask yuh a few questions?"

Tombstone looked him over lazily. "Shoot," he said quietly. "We know answers to most everythin', Sheriff."

"What," asked the sheriff, "was you two doin' over at Slim Devore's place? I mean the saloon, where yuh say yuh was stuck up by two masked men."

"We was askin' the way to Sunset Wells," replied Speedy.

"Hm-m-m-m-m," mused the sheriff thoughtfully.

"They both hum," remarked Tombstone quietly.

"And," continued the sheriff, "yuh found that yaller-haired kid all tied up in a hay loft on somebody's ranch."

"That's right." Tombstone nodded.

"And do yuh mean to say that he don't know why he was kidnaped, Jones?"

"Said he didn't. Yuh see, I allus stick to the truth, Sheriff, and I believe anybody. I'm kinda funny thataway, but I never feel that I'm bein' lied to, 'cause I'm so honest myself."

Tombstone's tone was convincing. The sheriff nodded.

"Why don'tcha ask us why we're over

here?" asked Speedy. "Yuh know blamed well yuh're itchin' to do it."

"Now that yuh mention it, why are yuh?" asked the sheriff.

"Well, I'll tell yuh," said Tombstone quietly. "We're two of the best detectives in the world, and we're over here investigatin'."

"You are — u-u-uh — hm-m-m-m-m-m! Best detectives—uh—I see."

"See all, know all," added Speedy soberly. "The things we've done has amazed the world."

"Yeah, I—well, I'm much obliged to yuh. I'll be goin' back to the office, Sloppy."

The sheriff got up heavily and walked away. Sloppy grinned widely and slapped his knee.

"That got him," he chuckled. "Hank gets mad awful easy."

"Why should he get mad?" asked Speedy seriously. "He asked us a civil question and got a civil answer."

"Wait a minute," said Sloppy. "You don't think for a holy minute that anybody'd believe you two are detectives, do yuh?"

"Sloppy, did yuh ever see a kangaroo?" asked Speedy soberly.

"Yeah, I did—once."

"Did yuh believe it?"

"No, I . . . What's this got to do with a kangaroo?"

"Nothin'. I just wondered if yuh ever seen one."

"I think I'll go back to the office myself," said Sloppy. "It's pretty hot today, and the heat gets me. So-long."

Tombstone turned around, put his feet on the porch railing and reached for his tobacco and papers.

"It just goes to show," he said quietly.

"Goes to show what?" asked Speedy.

"That it don't pay to tell the truth."

"Why did yuh, Tombstone?"

"Just to keep anybody from thinkin' we are detectives, I'd like to show 'em just how smart we are, Speedy. Yuh know, I wish we had a case to work on."

"Well, we ain't. I think I'll send Jim Keaton a telegram and ask him if anythin' has come up to demand our attention. Yuh never can tell. All places ain't as peaceful as this'n."

"If he says no," sighed Tombstone, "I'm awful scared that me and you will have to go to work. After buildin' up our brains all this time, it'd be a shame to tear 'em down, pokin' cows."

THEY went up to the telegraph office and wired Keaton:

HAGGARTY DEAD AND LAWYER MURDERED. NEITHER HERE. WHAT WE WANT IS SOMETHING WE CAN GET OUR TEETH INTO. HOW ARE YOU FIXED?

Before supper that evening they got Keaton's reply, which said:

I AM FIXED ALL RIGHT AND WOULD SUGGEST THAT YOU BITE THE MAN WHO MURDERED THE LAWYER. DON'T SEND ANY MORE WIRES COLLECT.

Speedy read the telegram aloud to Tombstone, who couldn't read.

"That's all right," Tombstone said, "but who is goin' to pay us for gnawin' on a murderer? Do yuh suppose he wants us to find out who killed the lawyer?"

"He don't say, but how can we bite him, if we don't know who he is?"

"Well, after all, who wants to bite him?" asked Tombstone. "Let's go down and annoy the sheriff. That's all there is to do."

They found Sloppy and another man in the office.

"Mr. Burke," Sloppy said, "I'd like to have yuh meet the two greatest detectives in the country—Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith. Gentlemen, this is Mr. Burke, the general manager of the Blarney Stone Mine."

"Happy to know yuh, sir," said Tombstone. "So is Speedy. Yuh don't happen to need a good detective, do yuh?"

"Two," corrected Speedy soberly. "We come in pairs, Mr. Burke."

Burke wanted to laugh, but choked it back.

"No," he said, "I don't believe I do. In fact, I don't know why I would."

"Have they quit high-gradin' the mine?" asked Tombstone.

Burke looked sharply at Tombstone for several moments.

"Where did you hear that, Jones?" he said.

"Is it a secret?" asked Speedy. "Sorry he spoke about it."

"Wait a minute!" snorted Sloppy. "What high-gradin' are they talkin' about, Ed?"

Ed Burke scowled for a moment. "Well, I'll tell yuh," he replied. "Hard-rock Haggarty thought we were bein' high-graded, but I didn't know that any-

body had talked about it. We tried to trap 'em at the mine, but didn't have any luck. Where on earth did you two men hear about that?"

"We can keep secrets, too," replied Speedy soberly.

Sloppy started to say something, but another man came in. This one was tall and thin, with a waxed mustache, silk shirt, and the general appearance of a gambler. He was Jim Kessler, owner and operator of the Oasis Saloon and Gambling House. Kessler spoke to Ed Burke, and then to Sloppy, ignoring Tombstone and Speedy.

"When are yuh going to turn Shine McCord loose, Sloppy?" he asked.

"When he decides to be a good boy, Jim. He's allus threatenin' to fill somebody full of lead, so we don't think it's a good idea to let him loose."

"I think yuh're right, Sloppy," said Kessler. "He's dangerous."

"Have yuh got Shine in jail again?" asked Burke.

"Yeah, he got on a mean drunk," replied Sloppy. "He keeps on sayin', 'I'll get out of here and I'll show 'em. They can't do this to me—I'll fill 'em full of hot lead.' "

"Who does he mean?" asked Kessler.

Sloppy shrugged. "*Quien sabe?* Mebbe me, I dunno."

Kessler laughed. "Mebbe he's sore because yuh roped him off the hitchrack, Sloppy."

"Could be." The deputy nodded. "Anyway, I ain't takin' chances."

Kessler and Burke went away together.

"Who told yuh there was high-gradin' goin' on at the Blarney Stone?" Sloppy said.

"A detective," replied Tombstone, "hears all and sees all."

"Well, what do yuh know!" exclaimed Sloppy.

"That'd be tellin'." Speedy grinned.

"I don't like things like this," declared Sloppy. "After all, our job is to combat crime—and how can yuh combat it, if nobody tells yuh things? You two are strangers, and yet yuh know more than we do."

"I wish Jim Keaton could hear yuh say that," sighed Speedy.

"Jim Keaton?" queried Sloppy. "Yuh mean, the Association man?"

"Yeah, I think he works for the Association."

"Huh!" Sloppy looked blankly at Tombstone. "You know him, do yuh?"

"Take a look at this," suggested Speedy, handing Sloppy the telegram they received from Keaton. Sloppy read aloud:

" 'I am fixed all right. Would suggest that you bite the man who murdered the lawyer. Don't send any more wires collect'."

"Hm-m-m-m-m!" murmured the deputy.

"We've got him hummin' again," said Tombstone soberly.

A LADY and a little boy stopped in the doorway, and Sloppy twisted around in his chair.

"Howdy, Mrs. Haggarty," he said. "Come in. Howdy, Bobby."

"Hi!" greeted the curly-headed youngster.

"I just stopped to say hello." The woman smiled.

She was very good-looking and nodded pleasantly to Tombstone and Speedy, when Sloppy introduced her to them. Bobby looked up at Tombstone and said, "Hi."

"Ain't he jist a dinger!" exclaimed Tombstone. "He shore is."

Mrs. Haggarty declined a chair. "I just came past to say hello," she insisted. "We haven't heard a single thing, Sloppy. No one has any idea why we were asked to come here."

"Well, yuh're goin' to stay, ain't yuh?" asked the deputy.

"I wish I knew what to do next," she replied wearily. "We are still in Dad Haggarty's house. No one has ordered us to move."

"They hadn't better," said Sloppy fiercely. "After all, Hardrock was Frank's father, and you was Frank's wife. If we could only find that will!"

"I wonder if Dad Haggarty ever made out a will."

"Yuh got to look at it this way," said Sloppy. "After Hardrock died, Smalley sent money to you, and orders to come here. Smalley did not know yuh persnally, Ethel. If somebody hadn't killed Smalley, I'm shore everythin' would have been all right."

"Mebbe it'll all turn out right anyway," suggested Tombstone.

"I don't see how it can," she replied.

"Yuh're like my pa." Tombstone smiled. "He was a awful pessimistic per-

son, and one time he said just what you don't see how it can.' "

"That," said Speedy seriously, "was the day you was born— and he was right."

CHAPTER V

Never Run Slaunchwise Of A Hunch

BOBBY shook hands and told each of them good-by. After they went away, Sloppy said:

"I'd shore like them to get that mine and all Hardrock's property. If they don't, Shine will."

"Has a nephew got more rights than a grandson?" asked Speedy.

"Mebbe not, when yuh come right down to the law, but everybody knows that Hardrock cut Frank off without a dime."

"What else did Hardrock own, except the gold mine?"

"Oh, he owned several of the buildin's here in town, and a spread over across the hills—the K Bar B. He don't run it himself, but he owned it. Not a big place, but worth money."

"Who runs it for him?" asked Tombstone.

"A feller named Moose Mahley."

Neither Tombstone nor Speedy made any comments, but that nickname clicked in their memory. "Moose" was the only name they had heard at that ranch. Speedy grinned. He had dumped the fifty-pound box on dynamite on the head of Moose.

As they went back to the hotel porch they saw the sheriff and Burke, manager of the Blarney Stone Mine, leave there and go over to the Oasis. Morris Frank was on the porch. He had bought a new shirt and a new hat, and looked quite presentable.

"Was the sheriff talkin' with you?" asked Speedy.

"Yes. He and another gentleman were asking me a few questions about my troubles. They wanted to know all about it."

"I hope yuh told 'em the truth," said Tombstone.

"Oh, I'm sure I did. They asked me what the men looked like and what they said, and if I neard any names. I told them that one man was spoken of by name, but I couldn't remember what it was. I said I'd ask you."

"And I said I didn't remember it either," said Tombstone.

"Well, you hadn't, until now, Mr. Tombstone."

"I saved yuh askin' the question, Morris. When are yuh leavin'?"

"In the morning, I believe. I sent my father a telegram today, telling him what had happened to me, but he won't believe me. You know, I'd like to be stationed permanently in this country."

"Yeah," said Tombstone drily, "there *is* a possibility."

"You mean, a possibility of staying in this country?"

"No, I reckon not. They'd ship yuh home."

Morris' eyes widened as he grasped what Tombstone meant.

"You—you don't suppose they—"

"They intended shootin' yuh, kid," said Speedy soberly. "They think you can identify them, and they don't like that feelin'."

[*Turn page*]

HEADACHE
UPSET STOMACH
JUMPY NERVES
RELIEF!
THANKS TO FAMOUS BROMO-SELTZER
Millions turn to Bromo-Seltzer to relieve ordinary headache three ways. It's famous for giving fast, pleasant help. Caution: Use only as directed. Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drugstore fountain or counter today. A product of Emerson Drug Co. since 1887.
BROMO SELTZER

"If I was you," said Tombstone, "I'd lay low till stage time tomorrow, and keep my head down all the way to Turquoise Bend."

Morris nodded. "I—I believe that is good advice," he admitted. "I shall stay close to my room tonight."

"Yuh'd be wise," said Speedy. "Another thing, Morris, did the sheriff or Burke ask yuh if yuh could identify any of the men in that gang?"

"The sheriff did. I said I didn't want to say, and Mr. Burke asked me if you two men had told me not to give information. I said you hadn't."

"Much obliged, Morris. Keep yore head till yuh hit some high spot on the other side of Turquoise Bend."

"I hope I shall see you in the morning."

"We both hope that," said Tombstone drily.

About an hour later they met Burke on the street, and he stopped to talk. Very confidentially he said:

"I've been doing a lot of thinking about you two boys, and what you know about high-grading at the Blarney Stone."

"Yeah, it's worth thinkin' about," agreed Tombstone.

"If you two want the job of cleanin' up this deal, come out to the mine tonight at, say, ten o'clock. Don't say a word to anybody. You'll find a watchman near the main gate. Ask him to show you to my office. We'll talk this deal over, and if we are both satisfied with terms and all that, you'll get the job—and at a good salary for each of you. Keep this under your hats. If it should leak out—well, this gang is plenty smart. See what I mean?"

"Yeah, we know what yuh mean, Mr. Burke," said Speedy. "We'll be there at ten o'clock, and yuh can depend on that."

"That's fine. I'll be waitin'. See you later."

Burke mounted his horse in front of the general store, and was soon riding away.

"Yuh see?" Speedy said. "We get the job, anyway. I wonder what he'll pay us . . . Hey, you long-legged gallinipper, ain't yuh glad we got a job?"

"Shore. It sounds fine."

"Wait a minute," said Speedy quietly. "Do yuh ache some place, or what's wrong with yuh, Tombstone?"

TOMBSTONE looked at Speedy. "How much is two and two?"

"Four."

"That's right. I thought I had it figgered out."

Speedy put his hand on Tombstone's arm and said quietly:

"That's swell, pardner. We'll go up to the room and put a wet towel on yore head for a while. Mebbe the hotel man can give us a little ice. You'll be all right. Yuh're just a little teched."

"I'd like the ice," said Tombstone. "I ain't had my head cold for years. But don't worry yore curly head about me. The heat ain't got me—I'm sufferin' from an awful hunch."

"Awful hunch?"

"A hunch that said, 'Don't be a fool. Keep away from that Blarney Stone Mine tonight."

"Oh!" grunted Speedy. "That's fine. Ask that pet hunch of yores why we'd be fools to go out there."

"No, I don't reckon that'd do any good." Tombstone grinned. "I figger thisaway to m'self; we'll saddle up and pull out about nine, but we'll switch around and come back. Hunch says, 'Stay in town.'"

"That," said Speedy, "don't make sense. The man offers us good jobs, and you listen to a crazy hunch."

"Go ahead, if yuh want to, pardner, but pers'nally I never run slaunchwise of my hunches. It don't pay."

"Then we don't take the job, huh?"

"We don't take it tonight at ten o'clock at the mine. Tomorrow, mebbe we take it. Pers'nally, I like to negotiate in the daylight. Don't yuh see? They think we know somethin'."

"That," declared Speedy drily, "is the advantage of not bein' well-known."

"Whatever it is, if the Blarney Stone wants to see me, it'll have to come down to Sunset Wells tonight."

They went back to the hotel and sat down. Speedy seemed just a bit gloomy.

"I think yuh're crazy, Tombstone—not considerin' that job," he said.

"If we have to go back pokin' cows, yuh can blame me."

"Well, that's real neighborly of yuh, I'm shore, Mr. Jones. Pile out of bed at daylight, eat alkali and pound leather until after dark, six days a week, and all I get out of it is forty-a-month and the complete satisfaction of knowin' that you are to blame—not me."

"If we're lucky enough to get jobs," amended Tombstone soberly. "Jobs ain't too plentiful."

"Yeah, that makes it a lot nicer," agreed Speedy. "What makes yuh think it'd be dangerous to go out to the Blarney Stone at ten o'clock tonight?"

"Makin' it exactly ten o'clock, for one thing. Why make it that late? Wait a minute, before yuh get sarcastic, Speedy. This Burke is manager of Hardrock Haggarty's mine, and Moose Mahley runs the K Bar B. I figger that Moose is *mucho malo hombre*. He showed that, until yuh dynamited him. This here Burke person is too blamed anxious to find out if Morris Frank heard any names over at the K Bar B, and if we told him not to talk. You can turn out to be a hero if yuh want to, but Old Man Jones' favorite offspring ain't goin' to ride up to no main gate and ask for Mr. Burke tonight."

"Yuh think they're gunnin' for us, too?" asked Speedy.

"That K Bar B gang have the feelin' that Morris knows 'em. If they've got any sense at all, they'd know we heard somethin', and that we wouldn't have to be very smart to understand that it was their gang that kidnaped the kid in Turquoise Bend. As long as us and that kid are here in Sunset Wells, that K Bar B outfit ain't goin' to sleep well."

"Mebbe yuh're right," breathed Speedy. "Yuh could be—once."

"And another thing, pardner," confided Tombstone. "Remember the argument down in that stable, before they discovered our hosses in the corral? One of 'em said they'd made a mistake, and another said, 'How'd we know this feller was too old?' "

"Yeah, I remember that."

"All right—it adds up, Speedy. They was supposed to git that little kid we saw today, Mrs. Haggarty's little boy, and they got Morris Frank, instead."

"Yea-a-a-ah!" breathed Speedy thoughtfully. "I'll betcha that's right! But why do they want the kid?"

"I ain't added that one up yet," admitted Tombstone. "Give me time, and I'll get it."

"Right through the ribs with a forty-five," added Speedy. "Yuh know somethin'? This town is gettin' interestin'."

"Do yuh still want to go out and talk about a job?"

"'Course not. Yuh've scared me into takin' a job pokin' cows, if nothin' else turns up, and I hope it won't be our toes."

HANK Adams, the sheriff, came over to the hotel. He tried to appear casual.

"Sloppy said you showed him a telegram yuh got from Jim Keaton," he said. "Yuh know him, eh?"

"Who—Jim Keaton?" asked Tombstone.

"Yeah. I mentioned him, didn't I?"

"That's right, yuh did, Sheriff. What sort of a hairpin is he?"

"Yuh're workin' for him, ain't yuh?"

"No-o-o-o."

"Then why did he telegraph yuh to bite a murderer?"

Speedy laughed, and the sheriff turned quickly.

"What's funny about it?" he asked sharply.

"Didn't yuh ever hear of a code message, Sheriff?" asked the little cowpoke.

"Code message? Oh, yea-a-ah, I see. But if yuh don't work for him, why should he send yuh messages?"

"Sheriff," said Tombstone soberly, "I hope yuh can keep a secret."

"I shore can!" snorted the sheriff. "Go ahead."

"Lemme ask yuh a few quartions. F'r instance—" Tombstone scowled thoughtfully at the floor. "F'r instance, how many road-runners would yuh say are in this county?"

CHAPTER VI

Close To The Chest

SHERIFF Adams scowled, too, but at Tombstone. Chaparral cocks were plentiful all over that country, but no one had ever made a census.

"Huh!" he said. "Road-runners? Oh, mebbe two, three thousand."

"Uh-huh. Didja ever measure one to see how long it is from its bill to the end of its tail?"

"'Course, I never! I reckon they'd be twelve, fourteen inches."

"Have yuh got them figgers, Speedy?" asked Tombstone.

"Yeah." Speedy nodded seriously. "Say, twenty-five hundred, at twelve

inches long. Yuh can see yoreself that it ain't enough."

"Not even if yuh put 'em end to end, Speedy?"

"Too short," replied Speedy. "We'll have to look some'ers else."

"Now, wait a minute!" said the sheriff. "Don't take my figgers for shore. Mebbe I'm wrong. I never counted 'em."

"No, I think yuh've got it about right, Sheriff. It's awful disappointin', but in our business we get used to it."

"Well, don't take my word for it."

"'Course not, but—well, I reckon we'll check a little further, before we mark this county off. If yuh can get any figgers that look better, I wish yuh'd tell us, Sheriff."

"I will," promised Hank Adams.

The big sheriff went back down the street, trying to figure out just what he had found out, and why. He found Sloppy at the office, and sat down, mopping his brow.

"What did yuh find out, Hank?" asked Sloppy.

"Not a dad-blasted thing! They asked *me* questions!"

Sloppy grinned slowly. "They did, huh? What about?"

"It"—Hank cleared his throat raspingly—"it is a secret, and I promised not to tell."

Sloppy stared at the sheriff for a few moments, and chuckled deep in his throat.

"Secret, huh?" He grinned. "Can't tell me, huh?"

"I can't tell yuh, Sloppy, but I can ask yuh. How long is a road-runner, measurin' from the end of his bill to the end of his tail?"

"What-a-at? The len'th of a road-runner? I dunno—mebbe a foot, mebbe more. That's a crazy question, Hank."

"All right. How many would yuh say are in this county?"

"Hank, I—oh, all right. I'd say—lemme see-e-e. Oh, maybe five hundred."

"As few as that, Sloppy?" Hank seemed sad.

"Listen, Hank," said Sloppy quietly, "you better go home and cool off. Take it easy for a few days. After all, a man is only as good as his mind, and yores has gone road-runner countin'."

"My mind is as good as yores!" snapped the sheriff.

"Then we'll both go and lay down for a spell. I didn't know I was that bad off, Hank."

"I'm goin' to send a telegram," declared the sheriff. "After I get an answer to that telegram, mebbe I'll shoot somebody."

Hank Adams stomped out of his own office and headed for the little telegraph office in the stage-depot, where he sat down and composed a telegram to Jim Keaton, which read:

ARE TOMBSTONE JONES AND SPEEDY SMITH WORKING FOR YOU AND IF THEY ARE WHY ARE THEY COUNTING ROAD RUNNERS. WHO CARES HOW MANY ARE IN THIS COUNTY AND WHY PLACE THEM END TO END. ADVISE.

The telegraph operator, who did all the other work required at the depot, read the telegram carefully, looked sharply at the sheriff and sat down at his desk.

"The countin' wouldn't be so bad, if they'd stand still," he said. "But all I've ever seen was runnin'."

"Yuh better stick to telegraphin'," growled the sheriff, and walked out.

"What this blasted country needs is a cool spell," declared the operator, to no one in particular. "A man can stand this heat only just so long. Look at the writin' on that telegram! Yuh can't tell me he's normal."

Back at the hotel again, they found Morris in the little lobby. He was even afraid to sit on the open porch.

"I received an answer from my telegram to my father, which I will show you," he said. "I told you he wouldn't believe me."

Speedy read the telegram aloud. It said:

I DON'T BELIEVE A WORD OF IT BUT GET OUT OF THERE BEFORE YOU GET HURT. A SALESMAN SHOULD KNOW WE DO NOT SELL OVERALLS AND CALICO YARDAGE SO STICK TO TOWNS WHERE WOMEN LIVE. I AM ASHAMED OF YOUR IGNORANCE. EXPERIENCE IS FINE BUT GETTING KILLED IS USELESS. YOU WOULD BE BETTER OFF AT HOME.

"I told him that if I had calico yardage and overalls I could sell this town," explained Morris. "He didn't understand. I told him that I had seen only two or three women here."

MORRIS ate supper with them in the hotel dining room, but went back to his room afterwards.

"Morris is all right," Tombstone said, "but he's awful ignorant, Speedy, and this is no place for ignorant people."

"I'll betcha that Morris went to college."

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Tombstone.

"Well, those places are supposed to combat ignorance."

"Yeah, but they don't win every time. What do yuh suppose I'd be doin' if I'd gone to college?"

"Countin' road-runners," replied Speedy soberly.

Tombstone chuckled slowly. "It jist goes to show yuh that yuh can lie and have folks believe it, but they call yuh a liar for tellin the truth."

"Yuh're an expert on lyin', and it sounds plausible, so when yuh do tell the truth, it don't sound true, Tombstone."

It was quiet that night in Sunset Wells. They checked up on the half-deserted hitchracks, the Oasis Saloon and along the streets, but everything was just a bit below normal.

"I wonder if we ain't makin' a mistake in not goin' to the Blarney Stone and findin' out about that job," Speedy said.

"Tomorrow mornin'—if we're alive—we'll try for it, Speedy."

They went over and sat down along the feed corral, where it was quite dark. The sheriff's office was across the street, but there were no lights in the place.

"Mebbe they've gone huntin' road-runners," Tombstone said.

"Pers'nally,". said Speedy, "I think we're acting like a pair of old ladies. Settin' here, waitin' for boogers to come. You and yore hunches! It must be almost nine o'clock How much time do we have to figger on gettin' out to the Blarney Stone Mine?"

"Sloppy said it was seven miles. We better saddle up about half-past nine."

"And circle back, huh?"

"That's right. Listen, pardner. If the Blarney Stone needs a couple danged good detectives at ten o'clock tonight, they'll need us jist as bad tomorrer mornin'."

"Yeah, I reckon so, but it seems silly, us settin' here in the dark, with our backs against a fence, waitin' for somethin' to happen. There's a old sayin'—'A watched pot never boils.'"

"As far as a pot is concerned . . . Who is that over there?"

A man had come up the dark side of the street, and now he halted in front of the sheriff's office. After a few moments he went back the way he came, stepped off the sidewalk and headed into the heavy shadow of an old building.

"Anythin' is liable to look suspicious now," Speedy said.

"Yeah, that's right. Let's go across the street."

They walked over to the sheriff's office and stood there. To their left was a narrow alley, leading back along the small jail, which was connected to the office by a short corridor. Everything was quiet. Speedy sat down on the high sidewalk, but Tombstone leaned against the corner porch post.

Suddenly he whispered, "Listen!"

Speedy strained his ears, and heard a voice, speaking low, but emphatically. Tombstone moved quickly over to the corner of the office, looking down the alley. The voice came from there. Speedy joined him, and they heard the voice say:

"Keep yore shirt on, yuh fool! I tell yuh, after tonight, everythin' will be all right."

They could not hear the reply, but the same voice said again:

"Here's a pint, but go easy. You do what I tell yuh, and yuh'll wear diamonds. They ain't got any deadwood on you, Shine. See yuh later."

They listened closely and heard the man walking away. When all sounds had ceased, Tombstone touched Speedy on the arm and they walked up the street to the front of the Oasis.

"Yuh see what I mean?" asked Tombstone.

"No—do you?" queried Speedy.

"Nope. But it's addin' up. We'll watch and see if that feller comes up here."

They watched through the windows of the Oasis, where they had an unobstructed view of the back entrance, but no one came in. The usual crowd was in the Oasis, and they could see the sheriff in a draw-poker game.

"Listen!" Speedy said. "If we're goin' to make a bluff at bein' at the Blarney Stone at ten o'clock, we better start driftin'."

"Yeah, that's right," said Tombstone. "We've got to make it look real. C'mon."

THEY went down to the livery stable, watching closely for any lone individual, who might be around there, but there was no one in sight. The livery stable had huge, sliding doors, which were several inches apart. Tombstone peered cautiously inside. Hanging near the front door was a stable lantern, illuminating the front, but the rear of the stable and the stalls was in darkness. The tall cowboy drew back, making no effort to open the door.

"Smellin trouble again, huh?" Speedy said.

"I'm playin' this hand pretty close to my bosom," replied Tombstone. "C'mon, let's see what this edifice looks like from the hind-end."

They crawled through the corral fence, ducked around some loose horses and made their way to the other fence, which extended slightly beyond the rear of the stable. They moved in against the stable wall, and took their observations through the fence at the corner of the stable.

It was quite dark out there, but they could see what seemed to be a man, leaning in close against the wall. Speedy pulled Tombstone back from the corner and whispered:

"There's a small window there, and he's watchin' through it."

"I'll fix his peeper," Tombstone breathed, and found a rock about the size of a goose egg. The man wasn't over twenty feet away from the corner. Tombstone whispered: "If I miss him, go flat and start shootin'."

They went back to the corner. The man was still there, and was in the act of cautiously lighting a cigarette. They saw the light flash on the barrel of his weapon. "He's got a shotgun, the dirty dry-gulcher!" Tombstone whispered. "Gimme room."

Tombstone drew back his long right arm, and flung the rock. The thud of the missile was echoed by a yelp of pain, and a moment later both barrels of a shotgun blasted the stillness of Sunset Wells.

Tombstone and Speedy were flat in the corral dust, trying to see what had happened. The man was gone, and they heard him cursing painfully some distance away. Men were running down the street, asking what caused the shooting. "Stay down!" Speedy said.

They heard someone yelling for the sheriff and deputy. The big doors of the stable creaked open, as men came looking. Speedy led the way, as he and Tombstone crawled out the other end of the corral, and came around to join the tail-end of the procession from the Oasis.

The sheriff and a number of men were in the stable, and they had discovered the stableman, bound and gagged in a stall. Sloppy and some of the other men found the shotgun behind the stable, and brought it in. It was an old, double-barreled, ten-gauge, sawed-off to shoot buckshot, and both barrels had been fired.

CHAPTER VII

Too Silly To Think About

NO one seemed to recognize the old gun. The dazed stableman said that he came to the back of the stable, where two men had held him up, tied and gagged him, but hadn't said a word. They hadn't hurt him any, except they had tied him pretty tight.

Hank Adams, the sheriff, looked grimly at Tombstone and Speedy in the crowd, as though blaming them for something. Tombstone said, to no one in particular:

"Yuh could hear the shots plumb over to the hotel. Nobody got hurt, huh?"

Sloppy had taken a lantern out to where they had found the gun, and reported that the gun had evidently been fired into the ground.

"Yuh can see where them loads of buckshot ripped the dirt," he announced.

"This is kinda funny," remarked the sheriff, but the expression on his face belied his words. "Why would anybody tie up Jim Hood, go out behind the stable, shoot twice into the ground and go away without their gun? I'd like to hear an answer to that."

"What's yore theory, Sheriff?" asked Tombstone.

"I'm askin'," reminded the sheriff. "Does anybody recognize this shotgun?"

Nobody did.

"Dad burn it," old Jim Hood exclaimed, "they also knocked out half of my back winder!"

"They did, huh?" grunted the sheriff. "Yuh know, it kinda looks like they

was aimin' to drygulch somebody in here tonight." The sheriff scowled at the men. "Any of you fellers stabled in here tonight? No? What about you, Jones?"

"Oh, we're regular guests, Sheriff," replied Tombstone easily.

"Yuh wasn't figgerin' on goin' away tonight, was yuh?"

"No-o-o-o."

"I see. Well, I don't reckon we can do anythin' about it. Somebody lost a gun, and if they want it, they'll have to come and get it."

"Before I forgit it," said Jim Hood, "I'd like to say that jist before the shots was fired, I heard a man yelp real loud, like he was hurt."

"Yuh mean—out back, Jim?" asked the sheriff.

"Shore sounded like it."

"Well, that still don't help us any."

"Prob'ly didn't help him either," remarked Tombstone.

"Meanin' what, Jones?"

"If he was hurt, it didn't help him none."

"All right, all right! I'll lock up this gun. Yuh're all right, Jim?"

"Shore. I wasn't hurt any, Hank."

"I want to see you two at the office," the sheriff said quietly to Tombstone.

They followed him over and he shut the door. Resting the butt of the old shotgun on his desk-top, he said:

"What do you two know about this?"

"Sheriff, we're as innocent as unborn lambs," declared Tombstone soberly.

"Yuh are, huh? I'd like to believe that."

"After all," said Tombstone, "we're peaceful folks. I dunno any reason why anybody would want to shoot us, unless—" Tombstone hesitated and shook his head. "Aw, that's too silly to think about."

"What's too silly to think about, Jones?"

"Aw, thinkin' that mebbe somebody don't want anybody to know how many road-runners are in this county."

The exasperated sheriff slammed the old shotgun into a gunrack, dusted off his hands and glared at Tombstone.

"All right," he said savagely, "I'm lockin' up."

The sheriff headed for the Oasis, leaving Tombstone and Speedy in front of the office. They walked out into the middle of the street and walked up to a point opposite the hotel, where they turned and walked over to the entrance. Those few dark alleys, between the sheriff's office and the hotel, didn't appeal to the two cowpokes.

THEY went cautiously into the lobby and sat down against the wall. Mort Young, the hotel man, was not in evidence.

"I'm jist one mass of goose pimples," Speedy said.

"Mebbe you'll admit that my hunch was good," said Tombstone, "except that we was to get blasted at the stable, instead of at the mine. Mr. Burke will have a job explainin' things."

"We'd have a job provin' things, too," said Speedy. "Let's go out and see if we can find somebody sufferin' from a rock swellin.' Yuh must have hit that feller pretty hard to make him shoot both barrels of that shotgun into the ground, and go away and leave it."

"Well, I didn't hold back on it." Tombstone grinned.

Speedy yawned widely and stretched his legs.

"I wish yuh'd consult yore hunch and see if anythin' more is goin' to happen tonight. I'd like to take on a little shuteye."

"What was that?" asked Speedy sharply.

"Sounded like a groan," whispered Tombstone. "Hey! Look!"

It wasn't very light at the top of the stairs, but they saw a man stagger into view, hunched over, trying to grasp the railing. Then his legs crumpled and he fell forward, turning a complete somersault. Tombstone and Speedy caught him as he straightened out and started to slide down.

He was Mort Young, his face streaked with gore. He had been hit over the head. Quickly they carried him down into the lobby and laid him on the floor.

"Out cold!" panted Speedy. "I'll get the sheriff!"

He ran swiftly across the street and met the sheriff at the doorway of the Oasis. Quietly he told the sheriff and they trotted across the street. Mort Young was beginning to recover, but was deaf to their questions. Sloppy had followed them over, and the sheriff sent him to get the doctor.

"Somebody busted him one," said Tombstone. "He was fallin' down the

stairs when we caught him."

"What's wrong with this town?" wailed the sheriff.

"The people in it," said Speedy, and went running up the stairs.

"Where in blazes is he goin'?" asked the sheriff.

"Mebbe," replied Tombstone, "he's just decided to get scared. He's awful hard to convince, but once he's convinced—"

Speedy knew where Morris Frank's room was located. He knocked on the door, got no response, and kicked the door open. There was no one in the room, but the bed had been occupied. Speedy turned and raced for the lobby, where Tombstone and the sheriff were hunched beside Mort Young, who was holding his head and trying to remember what happened to him.

Tombstone looked questioningly at Speedy, who said:

"Gone."

Sloppy and the doctor came in, along with several curious persons, and as the doctor examined Young's head, Tombstone and Speedy slipped outside.

"The kid's gone," Speedy said, "and they must have got him out of bed. What's to be done next?"

"Gosh!" gasped Tombstone. "I wish I . . . Wait a minute! Do yuh know where Hardrock Haggarty's place is?"

"Yeah! Straight up this street, turn to the right, and it's about a hundred and fifty feet down that right-hand street. It's that big house in the trees."

"C'mon, I've got me a hunch."

They hurried up to the first street to the right, but were unable to see anything in the darkness.

"Haggarty's house is down there on that other side," Speedy said, "but it's so darn dark that yuh can't see anythin'. Big trees in front of it."

Nearly opposite them and just off the road, was another big cottonwood.

"Well," Tombstone said, "I dunno jist what to . . . Now what the devil was that?"

From somewhere came the faint sound of a woman's scream, as though muffled by walls. The two men jerked ahead, but stopped.

"Was it from that house?" whispered Speedy.

"Couldn't tell," whispered Tombstone. "Sounded like a woman screamin'. C'mon —we'll find out somethin'."

They had run a few feet, when they heard a man say sharply:

"Get goin', yuh fools!" The voice came from down in the heavy shadows of the cottonwoods.

"Look out!" snapped Tombstone. "Here they come!"

GALLOPING horses were coming toward them, and they heard the rasp of iron-shod wheels on gravel, as a vehicle of some kind lurched away from the front of the Haggarty home.

Tombstone and Speedy quickly separated. The galloping horses were coming straight at Tombstone, who yelled:

"Stop, yuh fool!"

And then Tombstone's .45 tore up the gravel just in front of the oncoming horses. The frightened horses whirled to the left, crashed into the fence, and went down in a shower of splintered pickets.

The running team and buckboard swerved, when Tombstone fired, swerved just enough to throw the team into Speedy, and he went spinning from being hit by the shoulder of a horse, but not hard enough to put him out of the battle. He caught his balance, if not his breath, and started shooting.

A moment later there was another crash, when the right front wheel of the buckboard came in contact with a cottonwood tree. A shot blasted out from beside the crashed fence, and Tombstone staggered back, almost losing his balance. A bullet had furrowed across his left cheek bone. Another shot went wild, and by that time Tombstone had straightened up. He began pouring lead into the spot where the flash came from.

Men were running up the street. The team had snapped loose from the buckboard, and the crowd had to dodge the frightened animals. Speedy was trying to run on rubber legs. He fell over a man, got up, and ran into the rear end of the smashed buckboard.

"I reckon I'm kinda tangled up in the head," he announced.

Men were all around him now, and he laughed drunkenly.

"He-e-ey!" one of the men yelled. "Here's the Haggarty kid! Where'd he come from?"

"Go easy, men!" Hank Adams' voice rasped. "What happened, anyway? Yuh say it's the Haggarty kid? Is he hurt?"

"I don't believe he is, Hank. Nose skinned a little."

"Get a lantern, will yuh?" asked the sheriff. "We can't do anythin' in the dark."

"Here's one in the buckboard!" called a man. "Chimney's jist a bit cracked, but it'll work."

The lantern flared up, and the sheriff took it from the man.

"Good gosh!" exclaimed Sloppy. "Here's the yaller-haired kid, all tied up!"

Tombstone came into the circle of light, bleeding from his cheek wound, but grinning painfully.

"You, huh?" the sheriff said. "So yuh was mixed up in this, too. I'd expect it."

"To heck with you!" snorted Tombstone. "Where's Speedy?"

"Over huh-here," said Speedy painfully, "hangin' on a wheel."

"Good!" grunted Tombstone. "Keep hangin' on, pardner. I'd like to, but I ain't got no wheel. Sheriff, there's a man over against the fence—I think."

"Here's Moose Mahley!" yelled a man, who had lighted a match. "I'll bet four-bits he's deader than a door-knob, too!"

"Moose Mahley!" gasped the sheriff. "What next? The yaller-haired kid, Haggarty's baby and Moose Mahley! Look over by the fence—c'mon!"

CHAPTER VIII

Available

WITH the help of the lantern, they found a man sprawled against the fence, and held the light in close, while the doctor turned him over.

"Holy gosh!" gasped a man. "That's Burke!"

Two men came, carrying lanterns.

"Burke's been shot twice, Sheriff," the doctor said.

"Yuh better take a look at Haggarty's baby, Doc," said Speedy. "After all, him and the yaller-haired kid are all that counts."

"We've found Ike Moore!" yelled one of the men from a distance. "He don't need any doctor."

Some of the men had taken ropes off Morris Frank. The young man was all right, except for a few bruises and lack of wind. The doctor quickly looked Bobby Haggarty over and decided that he had not been hurt, except for a scratched nose. The youngster had never cried.

"I don't know much about it," Morris told them. "Two masked men came into my room when I was asleep, and woke me. They made me go with them. There was a fight in the hotel hallway, and one of the men said, 'I cooked his goose.' Then they tied me up in that wagon."

"Sheriff," said Tombstone, "yuh better find out about Mrs. Haggarty. I think we heard her scream. I'll pack the kid."

They found Mrs. Haggarty, tied to a chair, but not gagged. She almost fainted at sight of Bobby, safe in the arms of Tombstone Jones. The sheriff untied her, and she was so incoherent in her attempts to describe what had happened that it was difficult to understand. They had taken Bobby out of bed, put some clothes on him, after tying her to the chair.

"We heard yuh scream, ma'am," said Tombstone. "That's what saved the whole show."

"I screamed just as they closed the door," she said tearfully. "Bobby, are you all right?"

"Nose sore," said Bobby calmly, looking up at Tombstone.

"Yuh're a dinger." Tombstone grinned. "Kidnaped out of bed, thrown out of a runaway buckboard, and all yuh get is a skinned nose."

Tombstone wasn't too beautiful himself. A chunk had been knocked off his cheek-bone, and the blood had painted him like a streaky sunset. One eye was already swollen and blue. Speedy was still favoring his left shoulder, where the horse had hit him. The crowd filled the doorway, trying to understand what it was all about.

"Now that we have time to catch our breath," said the sheriff, "mebbe we can figger out what this is all about. It seems that Ed Burke is dead. Am I right, Doc?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes," he said quietly, "and you may include Moose Mahley and Ike Moore. Mahley was shot, but Moore apparently crashed into the tree."

"You must have hit Mahley, Speedy," said Tombstone calmly.

"I was, still spinnin', when I shot," said Speedy wearily. "I reckon I hit

Mahley and he swung the team into the tree."

"All right." The sheriff nodded. He turned and looked at Tombstone, who was grinning at Bobby Haggarty. "Jones, this whole thing is a mystery to all of us. I can understand that these men kidnaped Morris Frank and Bobby Haggarty. What else?"

"Yuh mean, what else can yuh understand, Sheriff?"

"I mean, what was this all about?"

"Oh, that!" Tombstone sighed, and felt his sore face.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you!" Mrs. Haggarty said. "Dad Haggarty had a safe built into the wall of his room, and these men robbed it. I think they took everything out of it, but I don't know what they were looking for. One man had all the papers."

"Hang onto yore hats, gents!" Tombstone said, and went out of there in three strides of his long legs.

Everyone looked blankly at everyone else.

"How can yuh account for a feller like that?" the sheriff said.

"Don't ask me," Speedy said quickly.

"Big man," said Bobby.

Tombstone was back quickly, carrying a small, canvas sack, stuffed with paper.

"They flew over the fence into the weeds, when Burke crashed," he said. "Sheriff, you and Doc better look 'em over. If I ain't mistaken, yuh'll find Hardrock Haggarty's will in that mess of papers."

THEY dumped the papers out on a long table, and the crowd eased into the room from the doorway. Mrs. Haggarty came up close, watching the two men sort the papers.

Tombstone sat on the arm of a chair and rolled a cigarette, and Speedy sat down, flexing the fingers of his left hand painfully.

"Yuh hadn't ort to try to block a runnin' hoss," said Tombstone. "Yuh ain't that big, yuh know."

"I didn't try to block him," retorted Speedy. "When yuh fired that first shot, yuh turned the team into me. It's a wonder yuh didn't kill me. Prob'ly will some day. Yuh never stop to think."

"Here's that will!" whooped the sheriff. "Doc, you read it!"

The doctor held it close to the lamp, his lips moving slowly, as he read it. Suddenly he looked up, cleared his throat and said:

"He willed the Blarney Stone and the K Bar B, and everything else he owned to Bobby Haggarty, except one silver dollar for Shine McCord. Congratulations, Mrs. Haggarty. That is a magnificent inheritance!"

"And," said the sheriff, "if we hadn't recovered the papers, I'm afraid . . . But, Jones, what is this whole deal?"

"Yuh know, Sheriff," replied Tombstone, "I've got me a hunch. Will yuh let me handle this in my own way?"

"Ain't nobody stopped yuh so far, have they, Jones?"

"Not all of us," said Tombstone. "Just you and Sloppy and the doctor. C'mon."

'How about me?" asked Speedy.

"Shore. Yuh're part of the set. Let's go up to the jail."

The crowd followed, but were shut out. They found Shine McCord only partially drunk, sitting on his cot, the bottle smashed out in the corridor. He looked at the five men apprehensively.

"Shine," Tombstone said, "the game is finished. We smashed the whole works a while ago. You are the only one left without bullet-holes. Yuh can hang for yore part of the deal unless yuh talk and talk fast."

Shine, peering between the bars, looking from face to face, decided that this was no joke at all. Tears welled up in his eyes.

"I—I never killed Smalley," he quavered. "They said I did it when I was drunk. They made me sign a confession. They said I'd inherit the Blarney Stone and I'd have to sign it over to them, but I didn't kill Smalley, I'm shore I didn't. Yuh've got to believe me!"

Shine clutched the bars, his knuckles white.

"They kidnaped the wrong man in Turquoise Bend," he said, "but they said they'd stop him from talkin' tonight. Burke knew that Haggarty had a safe in his house and they was goin' to find that will. Don't yuh believe me? I—I didn't do anythin', I tell yuh."

"What about the high-gradin'?" asked Tombstone.

"They done it!" exclaimed Shine. "Burke was the one. They took the stuff over to the K Bar B and were sellin' it to a man from Colorado. Honest, I didn't have no hand in it. Mahley and Burke

said they'd kill me if I ever talked. Mahley gave me whisky tonight. He said he had a man planted behind the stable to kill Jones and Smith. But I—I didn't do it."

The sheriff turned and looked at Tombstone Jones. "How did you know all this stuff, Jones," he asked.

"I—I guess I sort of read minds, Sheriff," replied Tombstone.

"What with?" asked Speedy soberly.

"Yeah, that's right, ain't it? I get hunches."

The doctor said, "I'll go up to the hotel with you, Jones, and fix up that cheek," as they filed out of the jail.

WHILE the doctor cleaned Tombstone's wound, they sat in the lobby, with a dozen or more interested citizens looking on. The sheriff came in.

"Jones," he said, "I just got an answer from Jim Keaton, a reply to a telegram I sent him today. I'll read it to yuh:

" 'Tell Jones and Smith to wire me if they are available, and will they please send final count on road-runners. Race between road-runners and horned toads too close to estimate winners.' "

Tombstone grinned slowly. "Yuh know, Sheriff, it's wonderful to live in a world where everybody is crazy."

"I wouldn't say that I am," stated the sheriff soberly, "but one more night like this, and I'll be herdin' sheep."

"One more night like this," said Speedy, "and we'll be playin' harps. Sa-a-ay! Does anybody know what available means?"

"I do," replied Sloppy. "It means loose."

"Sometimes," sighed Speedy, "Jim Keaton wastes money on the dangdest telegrams. Why ask questions at so much a word, when he knows blamed well we are. I'm going to bed."

The doctor was finished with Tombstone, who said, "I'll go with yuh, Speedy."

They were at the foot of the stairs, when Morris came in. The young salesman seemed still dazed, very dirty and torn.

"Mr. Speedy and Mr. Tombstone, I don't know what to say," he said.

"I do," said Tombstone. "Go home. We can't keep on savin' yore life every day. We've got to do somethin' for ourselves once in a while."

And they limped on up the stairs.

•

COMING NEXT ISSUE

LOVABLE LIARS

Another Tombstone and Speedy Novelet

By W. C. TUTTLE

•

CATCH ROPE

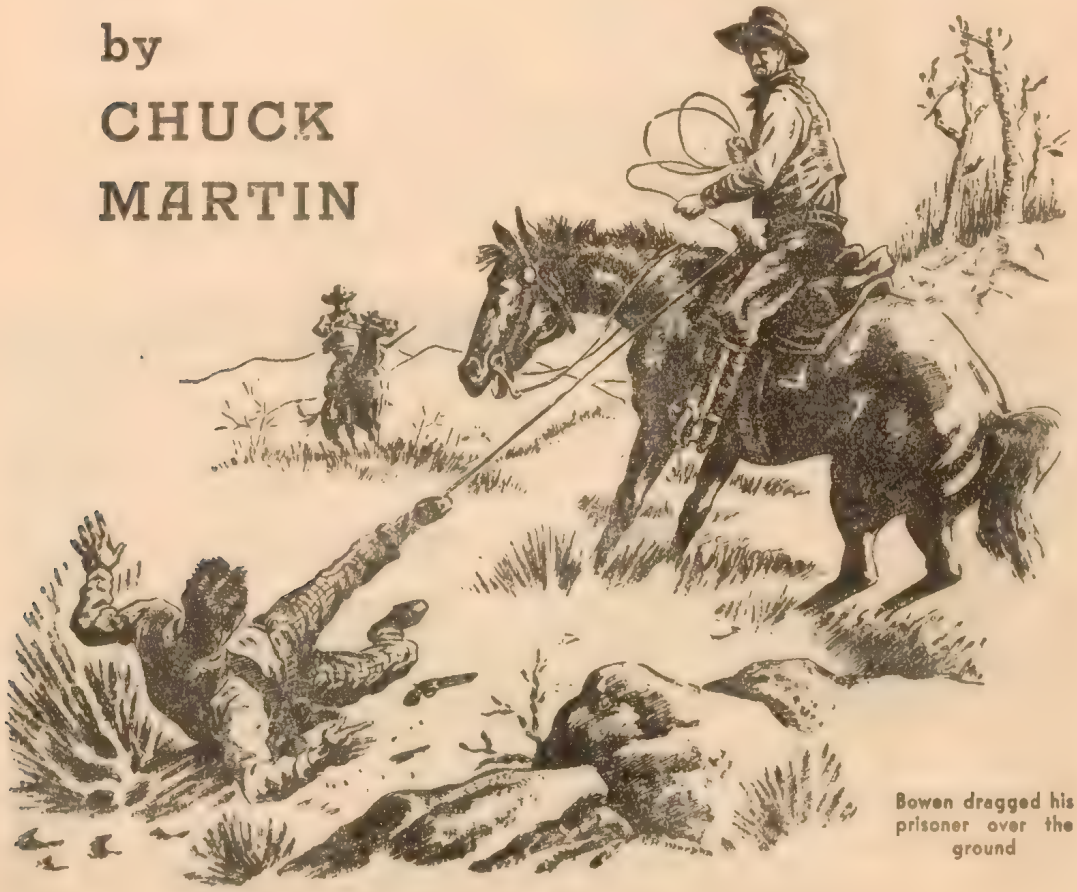
Tanglefoot Jim Bowen twists a long loop when he rides out after a wily gunfighter!

by CHUCK MARTIN

JIM BOWEN raised his head from the pillow when he heard the labored plodding steps of a spent horse coming up the alley behind his little shop. Bowen swung his feet to the floor and reached for his gray wool pants. Some sixth sense warned him that the rider was coming to see him, and a glance at his silver watch placed the time at a half hour past midnight.

Bowen reached for a heavy steel brace in the dark. His lip curled as his strong fingers fastened the heavy buckles around his left ankle with the sure familiarity of long practice. Those same fingers fastened the tie-backs of his holstered gun low on his right leg, just as the weary horse stopped at the kitchen door in the back.

A heavy body slid to the ground as a man's labored breathing gave a gasp of repressed agony. While in the darkness, Jim Bowen, cobbler and range detective, did some rapid deduction.



Bowen dragged his prisoner over the ground

He knew the rider was a big man, heavy of bone and muscle, past the flush of youth, and grievously wounded. Horse and rider had come a long way, and had just barely reached their destination which was obviously Jim Bowen's shop in San Angelo, Texas. Bowen limped to the door and opened it cautiously.

"Quien es?" he asked sharply in Spanish. "Who is it?"

"It is I, Manuel Torio, Senor Jaimez," a thick voice answered at once. "I bleed, Senor. Permit me to enter!"

Jim Bowen opened the door wide and reached out a strong hand to steady the giant Mexican as the latter swayed and would have fallen. A jaded gelding stood with drooping head near the door, and Bowen could see the red sheen on the saddle-skirts where Manuel Torio's blood had dried.

He helped the wounded man to a bench in the kitchen, thumbed a match to flame, lighted a coal-oil lamp, and turned the wick low. Bowen went to a cupboard, took a whiskey flask from a shelf, handed it to Torio, and poked some wood into the banked fire of his iron stove.

"You are shot above the heart, *amigo*," he told the Mexican. "You have ridden from Briar Creek twenty miles from here, so you must have been standing night-herd on Cleve Browning's Box B shipping steers!"

"Por Dios, but you know everything," Torio murmured. "It is as you have said, and the rustlers take the Senor Browning prisoner. So I come to you for help!"

"Better lie down on that couch there, Manuel," Bowen suggested quietly. "The bleeding has stopped, but you might start it again."

MANUEL TORIO raised the flask to his pallid lips and drank deeply. He tried to swing his boots up, but the effort was too much for his waning strength. Bowen caught the falling man under the shoulders and lowered Torio to the cow-skin couch, and his lips puckered in a soft whistle as he pulled aside the heavy wool shirt and stared at an angry wound just over the left breast.

"Made by a slug from a thirty-gun, and it went all the way through," Bowen whispered to himself. "This is a job for Doc Standish."

He winced as he turned too swiftly. An outlaw's bullets had shattered his left anke and foot more than three years ago, which was the reason for the heavy steel brace, and also the reason why Jim Bowen was no longer Chief Deputy to Sheriff Sam Ball.

There was a knock on the door. "It's me, Jim, Betty June," a voice said.

"Come in, Betty June. You're just in time!"

Betty June Hollister slid through the door. "I saw your light and knew something was up, so I hurried over," Betty June said. She had been Bowen's fiancee before his crippling gun fight. Now they were just good friends, because Bowen had insisted they could never marry until his leg was fixed. Jim Bowen was not a man who wanted sympathy.

"It's Manuel Torio, segundo for Cleve Browning," Bowen explained. "Rustlers ran off Browning's shipping herd, and Manuel stopped a slug. Will you run down and get Dr. Standish right away?"

"I will," the pretty girl said firmly. "I'll notify Sheriff Ball on the way down, too!"

She was gone before Bowen could protest, and he smiled grimly as he hobbled about the little kitchen, preparing hot water and clean rags. Bowen's hand went to his six-shooter when the jaded horse nickered softly in the alley, and he slid to a shadow and waited.

There was no window facing the alley, but the door began to open slowly. A saddle-gun poked through the narrow opening, and the six-shooter in Bowen's hand roared thunderously when a metallic click told him that the night-rider had eared back the hammer of his rifle.

The rifle blasted like a cannon and dropped to the floor just inside the door. A body fell backward as the door was pushed open, and then a hoarse voice called to Bowen.

"Hold your fire, Jim. Sam Ball coming up behind full guns!"

Jim Bowen leaned against a doorframe as a plume of black-powder smoke curled up lazily from the blackened muzzle of his Colt .41. His voice was gruff as he answered the sheriff.

"Drag the corpse in, Sam. We might learn who is rodding that gang of Border-hoppers!"

Sam Ball was a big man, and he showed no surprise as he came through the door, dragging the body of a man by the coat collar. He had seen Jim Bowen handle a gun, and the former deputy always called his shots with uncanny accuracy.

"I don't know the deceased," the sheriff said after a close examination. "Yuh got anything on him?"

"Yeah," Bowen said quietly. "A Wanted Poster came through just last week. About five-feet ten, age thirty-one, first joint missing from his little finger left hand; that will be Joe Connelly, better known as Slim Black. He's wanted for armed robbery and murder on both sides of the Border!"

"So?" Ball asked expectantly.

"He was a member of the Fennel gang," Jim Bowen answered swiftly. "There's eight or ten owlhooters in that pack, and they make a specialty of wet cattle."

"You got Slim dead center," Sam Ball remarked with quiet satisfaction. "How'd you see him?"

"He sneaked up the alley just before you got here," Bowen explained. "He came in behind his rifle, and he was aiming to finish up Manuel yonder. Evidently he didn't want Manuel to talk. Here comes Betty June and Doc Standish."

A small middle-aged man came into the kitchen with Betty June. Doc Standish was sixty, but the face under his snowy thatch was young and alert. He nodded to the sheriff and Bowen, opened his black bag, and made a swift examination.

"No probing to do," he grunted. "The slug passed all the way through, but he lost a lot of blood. I'll do what I can to prevent infection. The patient can't be moved!"

"Yuh've got a boarder, Jim," the sheriff said to Bowen. "Let's go into the shop and make law-medicine."

BOWEN nodded and hobbled to the door of his shop. Then he gripped a pair of rails and walked hand-over-hand to a low bench. The lithe muscles stood out on his back and shoulders as he made his way through the shop, and the sheriff's face twitched with silent sympathy as he watched.

There had been a time when Jim Bowen needed no sympathy. He was six feet tall, weighed two hundred pounds, was twenty-eight, and looked like forty. The light on a sign from a street lamp told the story of another change in Bowen, who had traded his saddle for a work bench. It said: JAMES BOWEN, COBBLER AND RANGE DETECTIVE.

"Manuel rode here from Briar Creek," Bowen said. "Slim Blacky and the Fennel bunch rode up from Rosita over in Sonora where they hole up. That's about thirty miles across the Rio Grande, and you can't ride into Mexico on official business!"

"Don't tell me what I can do," Ball remarked testily. "I'll get up a posse and catch those rustlers before they hit the Rio!"

"Shore," Bowen answered calmly. "I'll saddle up Big Jess and go along!"

"You won't, Jim Bowen!" a feminine voice contradicted sharply, and Betty June Hollister came to Bowen and stared into his deep-set gray eyes. "You'll stay here and let Sam Ball do the riding!"

"That's what ever!" the sheriff seconded the girl. "I can round up a posse come daylight!"

"And by daylight Crag Fennel will be across the Rio," Bowen said harshly. "Now yuh hear it my way, Sheriff. You and me will ride down there fast and cut Crag Fennel off. Your posse can start at daylight and tail that rustled herd."

He turned his head toward the kitchen when a voice called weakly in Spanish. Bowen gripped the rails and sped

to the kitchen where Torio lay on a couch, his brown eyes bright with fever.

"Senor Browning, he offers a thousand dollars for the capture of the *primero* rustler!"

"I'll see that yuh get the money, Jim," Sam Ball said gruffly. "Now that I know who to look for, and where to find him, it will be a cinch!"

"We won't be too long, Honey," Jim Bowen said to Betty June. "You'll look after the shop while I'm away with Sam?"

Betty June sighed and nodded. She knew the futility of argument, once Jim Bowen had made up his mind. Sheriff Sam Ball tried hard not to show his relief as he followed Bowen out to the little barn behind the shop.

"Yuh ought to have enough for that operation over Dallas way, after this little job," he told Bowen.

"I'm a whole man in the saddle," Bowen snapped, as he laid his saddle across Big Jess, his bay gelding. "We will split that reward, and you'll earn your share!"

Gray dawn showed faintly in the east as Jim Bowen and Sheriff Ball reined their horses to a stop on the flat holding-grounds near Briar Creek. They could see the trampled grass where the Box B herd had bedded down, and Bowen spoke briefly as he pointed to a huddled form on the ground.

"There's one of Browning's *vaqueros*," he remarked. "The trail heads south toward the Border, but we better take a short-cut!"

The sheriff nodded, noting the lines of pain which always showed on Bowen's face when he wore the heavy steel brace. Bowen slid to the ground on the right side, Indian-style. He sat down and loosened the buckles, stretched his injured leg out in front, and sighed with relief.

"Don't know as I'll go to Dallas," he told Sam Ball. "I couldn't stand the letdown if the operation were unsuccessful!"

"Which it won't be!" Ball snapped. "Doc Standish says yuh'd be well again in three or four months, and Betty June is counting on it!"

Jim Bowen sighed and stared moodily at a dead horse a few yards away. His hand started down to the holstered gun on his right leg, but he stopped the move when a harsh voice spoke suddenly.

"Hands up, Tanglefoot. You too, Johnny Law!"

JIM BOWEN had seen the lengthening shadow too late. A burly man with a stubbled red beard crawled out from behind the dead horse. He held a cocked six-shooter in each hand, but he holstered the spare in his left holster as he circled behind Sheriff Ball.

"Crag figgered you'd come trailing, Sheriff," the rustler sneered. "What about Slim Blacky?"

He reached down and emptied the sheriff's holsters, tossing the weapons behind the dead horse. Then he kicked the gun from Bowen's holster, stepped back, and waited for an answer.

"Yuh mean the killer who trailed Manuel Torio?" the sheriff asked gruffly.

"So yuh saw Blacky?" the rustler said, and his slitted eyes opened a trifle.

"I saw him," the sheriff answered grimly. "And the last I saw of Blacky, he was drawing flies!"

A startling change came over the bearded ruffian. He ignored Jim Bowen, and swung his six-shooter around to cover Sam Ball.

"I've taken up for Slim!" the outlaw grated. "Now it's yore turn!"

Jim Bowen was scratching under his vest on the left side. His hand whipped out with orange flame spurting from the muzzle of a short pistol, and the outlaw screamed as the heavy six-shooter was battered from his shattered right hand.

Sam Ball leaped like a cat as the outlaw slapped for the spare in his left holster. The sheriff's knotted fist caught the rustler under the chin, stretched him out on his back, and Sam Ball ran to the dead horse and retrieved his own six-shooters. He reached down to pick up Bowen's six-shooter, handed it to him with a word of reproach.

"He might have killed yuh, Jim. But thanks just the same."

"You knew it was coming," Bowen muttered dryly. "That one is Red Snyder, *segundo* to Crag Fennel!"

"Look, Jim," the sheriff complained irritably. "Why didn't you kill the rustling son? Now we're slowed down with a wounded prisoner!"

"Nuh uh," Bowen corrected. "Hobble Snyder with a three-bone tie. Fasten his left hand to his ankles with a piggin' string, and leave him by that dead horse. The posse can pick him up when they come along, but you and me had better be making tracks for Rosita!"

He was fastening the buckles of the steel leg-brace as he spoke, and then he pulled himself erect. He had trained Big Jess to stand while he mounted from the right side, thus allowing him to support his weight on his good right leg. The big bay stood quiet as Jim Bowen mounted, and then they were riding across the range toward the Mexican Border.

"Crag Fennel rides alone," Bowen remarked after a time, and pointed to the shod marks of a running horse. "He's riding a black racer, shod light, and he's no more than an hour ahead of us."

"I can see the shoe-prints, but how do you know the hoss is black?" Ball asked peevishly.

"Fennel stopped by a scrub oak back aways," Bowen answered soberly. "The horse rubbed some, and I saw the hair!"

"I looked at that tree," Ball said testily. "I didn't see any black hair!"

Jim Bowen made no answer. His face expressed some of the bitterness in his mind as he thought that where Nature takes away from one part of the body, she always adds something another part. Now Jim Bowen depended on his eyes and the ability to read what he saw, and when they crossed a small stream, he spoke again.

"Fennel ain't far ahead, Sheriff. He's lamed his horse in the left fore, and we ought to catch him up this side of the Rio Grande!"

"Wait a minute!" the sheriff burst out. "I just happened to think. If Fennel is riding alone, what about Cleve Browning?"

"I don't know," Bowen confessed. "But if we get Fennel, the gang won't do much to Browning. Let's separate here and fan out to thin the target we make riding together. And we better not shoot to kill!"

SITTING his horse in a buck-thorn thicket, Bowen listened intently. His keen ears had detected a scratching sound, like thorns rasping against leather boots. Then he saw the brush-tops move sightly. A man was hiding in the thicket, and the sign pointed to Crag Fennel.

Bowen could not see the man, but he did see something else. A high-heeled boot moved slightly, with the sole facing Bowen. He reached for his catch-rope, built a finnicky loop without shaking out his coils, and turned sideways in the saddle. The hidden man was lying on his stomach, and Bowen made his cast like a brush-popping cowboy who can shoot a noose through a hole in the brush.

A rifle barked flatly as the noose landed true over the polished boot. Bowen nipped his horse with a spur, took his dallies, and dragged his catch through the bracken as Big Jess leaped forward from a standing start.

Bowen glanced back and saw the struggling man trying to get to his holstered six-shooter. He reined his horse to the side as he nipped again with the spur, and the prisoner bounced along the rough ground like a calf being dragged to the branding fire. The man hit his head on a rock and lost consciousness. The pistol flew from the rustler's holster, and Sam Ball came racing up as Bowen slid his horse to a stop.

"Knocked my hat off, the bush-whacking son, but I got her back!" the sheriff shouted, and then he stared at the man on the end of Bowen's rope. "Yuh mean to say yuh roped him through the brush?"

"Sore," Bowen agreed dryly. "All I could see was that one boot!"

"Look, Jim," the sheriff asked grimly. "Yuh got a six-shooter belted on yore right leg. You're a special deputy, and

this jigger is a killer. Why didn't yuh use yore gun?"

Jim Bowen turned his face away when he answered. "All I could see was that left boot, Sam. I wouldn't wish a leg like mine on my worst enemy. Better slide down and tie him off, and when he rouses round, he might give up head and talk with his mouth wide open!"

"That's Crag Fennel, and he won't talk," Ball growled, but he dismounted and walked over to the unconscious prisoner. He reached for a pair handcuffs at the back of his belt, clicked them over the outlaw's wrists, and sat down to wait.

"I still think you should have salivated him," he complained, but Jim Bowen was staring at the prisoner intently.

Crag Fennel moved sluggishly. He was a tall spare man with very small hands and feet. A wisp of a mustache shadowed his upper lip under a long predatory nose.

Jim Bowen was staring at the prisoner's boots. He had taken a ball of dried clay from the instep of the right boot before Fennel began to stir. The clay had a right interesting color.

The outlaw sat up with a jerk and tried to slap for his gun. He scowled when the sudden jerk told him that his wrists were hobbled with steel. Then he quieted and stared up at Bowen.

"It's you, Tanglefoot," he said acidly. "I had a fine bead on what passes for the law in these parts, but you spoiled my aim!"

"Anything yuh say will be used against you," Sam Ball warned. "One of the charges is felonious attack against the law. Where's Cleve Browning?"

"Who's Cleve Browning?"

"He's the gent you're holding prisoner for ransom," Bowen answered bluntly. "How much yuh askin'?"

"My release, and five thousand dollars!" Fennel answered without hesitation. "You'll never find him in a dozen years!"

Sam Ball glanced at the sun and spoke to Bowen. "It's three o'clock, Jim. Let's start back with this killer, and we ought to meet up with the posse."

"His horse is down in that bosky," Bowen told the sheriff.

"He won't carry me far," Fennel said gruffly. "That's the only reason you law-dogs caught up with me. That black is lame in the left front leg."

"So you won't make a get-away on him," Bowen reminded the outlaw.

Sam Ball rode down and led up a tall rangy black. Jim Bowen tightened his leg brace and went over to pick up the crippled leg of the horse. He smiled as he took a marking knife from his pocket, opened the blade, and pried a three-cornered rock from the frog of the hoof. Then he held the black while the sheriff boosted Fennel to the high saddle.

"Lead him, Jim," the sheriff told Bowen. "I'll bring up the drag, and if Fennel tries a break-away, I'll shoot to kill!"

Jim Bowen nodded and pulled himself to the saddle from the right side. Then he started to back-track their trail, but after riding a mile Bowen headed north and east. Sam Ball objected.

"We'll miss the posse this way, Jim. You're heading toward Adobe Springs!"

"We can camp there tonight," Bowen murmured lazily. "Get an early start in the morning, but we'll eat cold tonight. I don't want to build a fire."

THEY camped at the flowing spring just as daylight waned. Crag Fennel complained about the handcuffs, but Sam Ball fed him a pair of meat sandwiches, refusing to remove the irons. Then they made preparations for sleep, and Jim Bowen sighed as he removed the heavy brace from his left leg. Crag Fennel was propped against his own saddle, and he was asleep before the sheriff had bedded down for the night.

Jim Bowen awakened with a start as the last light of the false dawn faded from the sky. It would be light again within a few minutes, and Bowen reached for the Bisley Colt on his right leg and smoothly thumbed back the hammer. The six-shooter roared to flame when a metallic click sounded faintly toward the foothills, and then the thudding hoofs of a running horse verified a fact Bowen already knew.

Sheriff Ball came out of his blankets with a six-shooter in his right hand. Jim Bowen spoke quietly, but with a tinge of bitterness in his deep voice.

"Craig Fennel made a get-away, Sam. He must have slipped those cuffs while you and me were sleeping. I didn't hear him until his horse stepped on a rock."

"I should have known better," Sam Ball growled. "That Fennel hombre has little hands and wrists like Billy the Kid. The Kid escaped several times from hand-cuffs, and we should have hobbled Fennel with a hoggin' string!"

"He's heading for some place around Adobe Springs," Bowen said positively. "It will be light enough to see in a few minutes, "and we can eat the rest of those meat sandwiches while we're waiting."

"This is tricky country," the sheriff complained. "I've got Fennel's six-shooter, but like as not he'll have another cached away back yonder. Yuh know this Adobe Springs country?"

"I used to hunt back here," Bowen answered. "We cross Turkey Creek up aways, and there are quite a few caves. There's a big one near the Springs. I saw red adobe on Fennel's boots, but it won't take long to find out."

Ball had saddled the horses, and the first rays of sun slanted down from the higher peaks as they finished their scanty breakfast. They mounted and rode toward the north, and after crossing a brawling creek, Jim Bowen leaned down to read sign.

"Fennel headed toward that low cave you can see up yonder," Bowen muttered. "One man could hold back an army from that little mesa, but I have a plan that might work."

"What ever it is, I'll do the leg work," Sam Ball said gruffly.

"You stay down here where Fennel can see you," Bowen ignored the interruption. "There's a hole on top of the mesa, and it leads into that cave. I'll make my catch-rope fast, and let myself down hand-over-hand while you kick up a fuss down here!"

"I'll go down that rope!" the sheriff argued stubbornly.

Bowen sucked in a deep breath, and his nostrils quivered. "You don't know where the chimney is, and I'm stronger than you in the arms, for obvious reasons," he said in a rasping voice. "You keep out of gun-range, but make plenty of noise to keep Fennel interested!"

Sam Ball glared angrily, and then nodded his head. Jim Bowen always knew what he was doing, and Bowen touched Big Jess with a heel and rode toward the back of the little mesa through a grove of wild pecan trees.

Bowen rode to a group of rocks and swung to the ground. He had found the cave on a hunting trip when he had trailed a small brown bear. That had been before the fight in Diablo Canyon, and Bowen's face hardened as he swung his crippled leg over a rock for support. He thought of the operation which might restore his crippled leg; thought of the three years Betty June had waited for him.

Bowen took his lariat from the saddle-horn, searched for a short branch from a dead-fall, and fastened the seasoned wood through the bight of his hondo.

He wedged the branch firmly between two tall rocks, took the coils in his left hand, and climbed to the chimney-like aperture. He heard a shout from below the mesa and recognized the wind-rough voice of Sam Ball.

Jim Bowen tested the rope and lowered himself into the hole. He had thought it all out, and knew just what to do if luck were with him. He would have to hold the coils and let them out as he descended to prevent the rope from dropping to the floor below where Fennel might hear it fall. Halfway down he heard the raucous voice of Crag Fennel.

"Stop where you are, Sheriff! I'll kill Browning if you come any closer!"

BOWEN stopped his descent and listened. Now he knew that Cleve Browning was a prisoner in the cave, and he lowered himself another three feet before he heard the muffled voice of Sam Ball.

"We've got you surrounded, Fennel.

You can't get away!"

"I'll make a trade!" the outlaw shouted. "I can ride out on Browning's horse, and you ride in and get him after I cross Turkey Creek!"

"How do I know Browning is still alive?" Sam Ball asked hesitantly.

"Say something to the law!" Bowen heard Fennel order gruffly, and then another voice spoke.

"I'm alive, Sheriff. Cleve Browning speaking, and I haven't had water for more than a day!"

"You satisfied, Sheriff?" Fennel shouted, and Jim Bowen again lowered himself slowly.

Bowen knew the sheriff's dislike for making any trade with a criminal. But an honest man's life was in jeopardy, and Cleve Browning began to shout hoarsely.

Taking advantage of the noise, Bowen lowered himself to the floor of the cave. His eyes had become accustomed to the murky gloom, and he could see glittering stalactites of limestone between his hiding place and the entrance to the cave.

Cleve Browning was seated on the floor with his hands tied behind him, and around a tall glistening pillar. Crag Fennel was facing the entrance, using a knob of rock for protection. A six-shooter spiked from his right hand, and Bowen saw the empty holster on Browning's right leg.

Bowen rested on his good right leg. His left ankle was throbbing with pain from the tight buckles on the steel brace, but he set his teeth and slowly drew his heavy .41 Colt. He knew that Fennel would whirl if he cocked the gun in his hand, and then Browning began to plead with the sheriff in hoarse rasping tones.

"Let him go, Sheriff! I've got to have water!"

Jim Bowen cocked his pistol while Browning was shouting. Then he raised his arm and covered the scowling outlaw near the cave entrance. He could have killed Fennel without taking a chance, but Bowen shrugged irritably and held his fire.

His eyes widened when he saw the outlaw taking careful aim. He heard a grunt when Fennel pressed trigger, but the outlaw's triumph was shortlived. Jim Bowen lined his sights and squeezed off a slow shot, and the smoking gun leaped from Fennel's hand as a bullet smashed into his wrist.

Jim Bowen followed through and took a quick step into the cave. His left leg gave way and tumbled him to the limestone floor, but he rolled up in time to see Crag Fennel make a desperate snatch for his fallen gun.

Bowen made a lunge and tackled the outlaw below the knee. Bowen had lost his own gun in the fall, but he jerked the tall outlaw down and fell on top of him.

Crag Fennel's fingers slipped on the gun, but he fought like a cornered lobo as the two powerful men thrashed around on the hard floor. Then Bowen had the outlaw in a bear hug, and he squeezed until Fennel gasped a surrender.

"I give!" he panted. "Don't break my back!"

Jim Bowen's eyes were closed. His left leg throbbed with a pain almost beyond endurance. Then he opened his eyes and relaxed his grip slightly.

Crag Fennel brought up his knees in a spasmodic jerk. But Bowen had anticipated the treachery, and he tightened his bear-trap with a jerk that brought a scream of agony from the outlaw's lips.

Bowen loosened one arm and turned slightly. Fennel again sensed freedom, and he made a last desperate effort to escape. But Jim Bowen's right fist crashed against the outlaw's jaw, and Fennel wilted and sagged to the floor like a worn rope.

Jim Bowen waited a moment while the spasm of pain lessened in his leg. Then he pushed himself to his knees, reached for his stock knife, and crawled over to liberate Cleve Browning. Taking the short rope which had hobbled the cattleman, Bowen turned Fennel face-down and bound the outlaw's wrists tightly behind the broad back with the stout piggin' string.

"Jim Bowen!" he heard Browning gasp. "Water!"

Jim Bowen took a small metal canteen from the back of his belt. It held only a swallow or two, but too much water right now would be dangerous for Browning. He handed the precious liquid to the cattleman; nodded approval when Browning merely wet his swollen tongue.

"He meant to kill me, Jim," Browning whispered hoarsely. "Did he get the sheriff?"

Jim Bowen pushed slowly to his feet. He raised his head as he approached the entrance of the cave.

"Sam!" he shouted. "Are yuh all right?"

Sam Ball made no answer. Jim Bowen hobbled into the light and made his way down a steep path. Then he saw the sheriff's old gray Stetson lying on a scrub-oak branch, with two holes through the crown.

Bowen limped forward, and he saw Sam Ball lying in the brush below his hat. A streak of crimson showed against the lawman's graying hair, and Bowen went to his knees and traced the path of the bullet.

"Creased him!" he muttered. "Half an inch lower, and Sam would have been an ex-sheriff!" . . .

SAM BALL sat up slowly and rubbed his aching head. His narrowed eyes were glazed with pain, and he blinked when a soothing voice spoke softly.

"You're all right now, Sam. His slug just grazed your scalp!"

Bowen's slow soothing voice seemed to clear up the dazed man's brain. Sam Ball straightened up and turned to face Jim Bowen who was sitting on the floor of the cave with his left leg stretched out in front of him. Then the sheriff saw Cleve Browning and Crag Fennel, and his right hand slapped down for his empty holster.

"I've taken your gun, Sam," Bowen said in his quiet drawl. "I thought you might be a little hazy when you roused around!"

"I'd have killed the son!" the sheriff admitted fiercely. "He parted my hair with a slug, and he'd have killed me if you hadn't bought chips in the play when you did!"

"He's bleeding bad," Bowen explained. "I shot the gun out of his hand, but he still fought like a lobo. Can you take over until I climb up that rope to my horse? I can't walk a step!"

"You carried me up here?" Ball asked slowly.

Jim Bowen made no answer. He was tightening the buckles on the heavy brace, and perspiration stood out on his forehead. He hopped over to the natural chimney, gripped the dangling rope, and started to climb hand-over-hand.

Crag Fennel listened with his jaws tightly clamped against the pain in his shattered wrist. That right wrist was bleeding profusely, but it was doing something else. Jim Bowen had made his ties securely, but the seeping blood was like a lubricant to the man who could slip through a pair of steel handcuffs.

Fennel watched as Cleve Browning crossed to the entrance of the cave. Fennel freed his hands and leaned forward. His eyes sparkled as he saw the sheriff nod and then slump forward. Then the outlaw's left hand shot out and snatched the falling gun from the dazed sheriff's fingers.

"Don't move, Browning!" the outlaw warned softly. "Or I'll shoot you in the back!"

Cleve Browning froze to immobility. He could almost feel the gun pointing at his spine, and then Fennel spoke again.

"Step back slow and let Bowen come in. I mean to settle with Tanglefoot once and for all!"

Jim Bowen stopped halfway up the rough chimney, and then he lowered himself quickly to the floor. He saw Browning crouching near the cave entrance, with Crag Fennel not more than fifteen feet away. Fennel was holding the sheriff's captured six-shooter in his left hand, and the gun roared when Browning threw himself sideways to the floor.

Jim Bowen twitched the rope as the echoes bellowed through the cave. The branch came loose at the top, fell down on Bowen, who twitched his hondo free and began to build a loop. Then Sam Ball aroused himself and shouted at the outlaw.

"Better surrender, Fennel. My posse will riddle you with slugs!"

"They'd riddle me anyhow," Fennel sneered. "I missed Browning that time, but I won't miss again, and your turn will come next!"

"Don't shoot!" Browning pleaded hoarsely. "You've got three thousand of my money and the sheriff will let you ride on out!"

"I'll ride out!" Fennel boasted. "But you won't know it, and I'll settle with Tanglefoot Bowen once and for all!"

HE raised the gun in his left hand and clicked back the hammer. The sheriff heard a soft hissing sound, and he saw Crag Fennel's head jerk back just as the outlaw pressed the trigger. Sam Ball also saw Jim Bowen hip-lean against the rope he had thrown, and Fennel was jerked backward to the floor. Then Bowen's left leg gave way to spill him, and Cleve Browning straightened slowly and shuddered when he saw the heavy hondo behind Crag Fennel's left ear.

"You broke his neck, Jim," Browning whispered hoarsely.

Jim Bowen stretched out his leg and unfastened the heavy buckles. "I didn't go to do it," he admitted hoarsely, but there was no regret in his deep voice. "My leg spilled me just as I was choking him down. I thought he had done for you!"

"His slug just missed the top of my head," Browning said shakily, and he walked over to the inert body. He reached under Fennel's vest and withdrew a flat leather wallet. He handed it to Sheriff Ball, but Jim Bowen slowly shook his head.

"There's the three thousand that outlaw took from me, Sheriff," Browning said slowly. "Give it to Jim for that operation. Then him and Betty June can get married."

"The reward was a thousand," Bowen said quietly. "Sam and I will split that reward, but we don't want money stolen from an honest man!"

"Yuh heard what Jim said," Sam Ball muttered and he tossed the wallet back to Browning. "Now yuh better go up on top and lead Big Jess down here for Jim. We're goin' after them cattle Fennel's bunch stole from yuh!"

"And there's something else you can do for me, Cleve," Bowen said grimly, and he threw the end of the rope from him. "I couldn't use that rope again, so when we get back to town after this job is finished, you can buy me a new catch-rope!"

•

NEXT ISSUE

RANGER OUT OF BOUNDS, a Novelet by JACKSON COLE

•

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE FINGER-NAIL TEST?
TRY IT! Scratch your head! If you find signs of dryness, loose ugly dandruff, you need Wildroot Cream-Oil hair tonic. Grooms hair relieves dryness . . . removes loose dandruff!
YOUR HAIR CAN LOOK LIKE THIS WITH NEW WILDROOT CREAM-OIL
A LITTLE Wildroot Cream-Oil does a lot for your hair. Keeps your hair well groomed all day long. Leaves no trace of that greasy, plastered down look. Makes hair look and feel good.
CREAM-OIL CHARLIE SAYS: "IT CONTAINS LANOLIN!"
TUNE IN . . . "The Adventures of Sam Spade" Sunday evenings, CBS Network.
WILDROOT CREAM-OIL Hair Tonic

by NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

BULLET TRAIL TO BEXAR

CHAPTER I

"We Want That Team!"

WHEN the girl appeared, Michael Tawn was not aware of her. True, he had seen her before, had even talked with her in the abandoned stage waiting room outside the small hotel, when she had asked him for transportation westward, and he had denied his help. But Tawn had been disturbed by her looks, her bearing, by the bright glory of her bronze hair escaping from under the pert poke bonnet she wore, by her hazel —almost sea-green—long-lashed eyes. But he had said "No." And Michael Tawn had a way of saying "No" that left no room for argument.

Now, in the stables just a little to the rear of the crude frontier hostelry, he faced three men and he didn't know she had just come in, looking for him again. Persistent.

"Might as well talk sense," one of the men was saying to him. "You ain't goin' to get where you're headin' with that outfit anyhow. Best make a good sale and turn over what yuh can here and now."

And Mike Tawn said, "No," again.

He was no more than twenty-three, but there was a competence about him. There was a width to his shoulders and a pantherlike slimness to his hips belying any immaturity. He wore a new Colt's below his right hip and a long knife was stuck in a sheath at his left side. He was wearing *chaparejos* over fringed buckskins, and a battered sombrero was cocked to one side over his dark lean face. His eyes might have been blue but at the moment they looked slate-gray.

He spoke softly. "Yuh wouldn't be aimin' to stop me?" He looked from one man to the other.

"It ain't that, Tawn," the man who

had spoken said placatingly. "Yeah, we know yore name. We know where yuh're headin', and what's more we can guess why. It's only bein' friendly to offer to buy yore outfit at a top price. Hosses is scarce, so is wagons, since the troubles tarted. A cool thousand, U.S., for the outfit. On the nail!"

Again Mike Tawn said "No." His hooded gray eyes under slitted lids gauged the three men confronting him. One was patently a Mexican, he had heard called Aranjas. How the fellows managed to remain in the turbulent Republic of Texas when Texas was aflame from border to border in the quarrel with Mexico, when the news from Resaca de la Palma came drifting in daily, was a mystery. But Tawn had no interest in mysteries.

ONE OF the other men was a Yank. His name was Lansing, and he was known to be one of Crane Brokenshaw's lieutenants—Brokenshaw, the discredited New Orleans speculator who was

Neither gunfire nor ambush nor treachery can stop Michael Tawn when he fights to aid the embattled Texans!

a novelet

buying up Texas land while Texas was facing an enemy to the south. Texas land properly disposed of by its present owners, whether Mexican or others, was guaranteed to its holders. But a lot didn't want to hold.

The third man present was Brokenshaw himself, and he was the one who was speaking, his voice persuasive.

"Shucks, we know why yuh want to go on, Tawn. I just tole yuh as much. And I also told yuh that yuh won't ever get to where yuh're headin'. Nobody's gettin' that far, not these days. Them as did make it through are due to get massacreed at Bexar."

Tawn's eyes held ice. "Yuh guarantee?"

"I guarantee. I should know."

"Yes, all the renegades know," Tawn agreed coolly. "But in that case, what do yuh want with this wagon and team?"

Brokenshaw brushed a hand over his mouth and looked down.

"I can use it," he said. "My business is my own. I got friends to the west, and you ain't. I need what yuh got, and I'm offerin' yuh a bounty price. I'll even let yuh name yore own price for what cargo yuh might be carryin'."

"So," Tawn drawled, "yuh think I've got cargo?"

His voice was bitterly cold, under his loose black silk shirt muscles rippled, like those of an angry animal. His hand made no move toward his hip, though.

There was about him a bitter harshness which the watching girl found puzzling. She had not come here to the stables, with any intention of interrupting a conclave. She had merely come in a last attempt to prevail upon this man to accede to her wishes. If he was arrogant, so was she, but she had a stern purpose. However, these men seemed to have purposes, too.

But no one could help being aware of their leashed tenseness. As if they were holding themselves in to prevent a sudden blast that could only mean fury and probably death.

There was a presage of violence and death in the very strained quiet of their voices. She had been aware of it in others, ever since she had landed at San Arturo two days before, hoping to make her way from there. She had made it this far, but still had a long way to go.

This raw land in the beginnings of its struggle against an overwhelmingly powerful enemy had at first shocked her. Now she was coming to have a glimmering of understanding. Chivalry, she had assured herself, when she had stepped aboard the packet running across the Gulf from New Orleans, had died. Certainly it was hard to believe it could exist in this tall, hard man with the thick reddish-black hair who was facing these other men in the stables.

Tawn eased forward slowly. "If you can guarantee that nobody can get to where I'm headin'—and yuh seem to know," he said to Lansing, "what do yuh want my wagons and cayuses for? Except to make shure, mebbe, that I don't get there?"

"Mebbe we ain't goin' in that direction," Brokenshaw said, in an unctious voice. "Everybody's leavin' the road to San Antonio de Bexar right now. It's turned into a bullet trail! Santa Anna and General Cos, they've got yore patriot hombres all holed up in a place they call the Alamo, in Bexar. Church, or mission, or something. It's due to be a last stand, and it looks like it's about over. No reinforcements, nothin'. And nothin' can get through, yore *amigos de Mejico* have seen to that. But our business is to file for the free land in between. There's lots of it." He spread flabby hands pontifically. "There's yore answer. We want to be first to get where we're goin'."

At the mention of filing for land the girl made a quick involuntary movement. Then she grew still again.

Brokenshaw made a sign and a big man who apparently had been standing guard outside, came through the door and moved in.

"We got to get that wagon and team, Tawn," Brokenshaw said gravely, "Sorry!"

Like a signal, that last word was. In the next half second the stables blanked out in a trembling, shifting cloud of acrid gunsmoke. Brokenshaw went hurtling back through the layers of it, to get out of the way, and the girl could see the tall, pantherish figure of Tawn standing a little bent at the knees, the long pistol in his big fist.

His eyes held amber-green lights as he leaned to watch the man he had shot begin to slide against the side of a stall, and then, as though missing a grip, go slowly floorward, his gun in his hand reaching the hay and straw at his feet

ahead of him. His eyes were glazing as he hit the floor.

There followed a long moment of complete silence. Then came Tawn's quiet voice:

"Yuh better get on your way, Brokenshaw, and take your men with yuh."

BROKENSHAW said no word in reply. He might have had a weapon, but if he had he didn't produce ti. Either he, Lansing or Aranjas could have got Tawn, but Brokenshaw knew he would be the one to go first. He stared blankly at the girl's white face for a second, then went out hurriedly through the door. Lansing and Aranjas followed him wordlessly.

Tawn turned from watching their back; stepped carefully over the fallen body of Brokenshaw's henchman, a body already oozing crimson from a wound just above the heart. The horses in the rear were stamping in fear. He spoke to them softly, a caressing note in his voice. There was the sound of harness metal, sliding leather, trappings.

The gunsmoke wavered again and Tawn came stepping out leading two big animals, moving between them. He halted once, with no emotion visible, the dark planes of his face carved and eyes opaque, no longer youthful, and bent to lug the gunman's body from his path. Then he went on. The wagon stood outside.

At the door he stopped. He seemed to have forgotten the girl again, though he had seen her. Then suddenly he became aware of her presence.

"You were there, all along," he said.

"Yes," she said. "I had to talk to you again."

"You saw what happened?"

"Yes, I saw it."

He nodded absently. "Too bad," he said. "But like I tried to tell yuh before, this is bad country right now. Too bad you had to see. But those gents—they aimed to stop me doin' somethin' that I just got to do."

"It's to get to San Antonio — to Bexar!" she said, in a quick breath.

His regard was troubled, grave. "It's to get as near to Bexar as I can," he said. "I'm too late to help out with Travis and the others. Some of 'em friends. But if I am too late it's because I was doin' something to help the general idea along, and was held up. Like I'd have been held up right now if I hadn't known how to use guns."

He went on wearily, "You said to me before that you wanted to—"

"To go on to Bexar—with you!" she said. "Of course I expect to pay, but I must get near there!"

"You won't need to talk about pay and you won't get all the way there," he said, in the same toneless voice.

He stood looking at her, his gray eyes narrowed, studying her, disregarding her fresh young beauty, searching out something besides.

There was a sound in the street, but neither of them paid attention. Shooting, even killings in this town, inland from the Gulf, were not inquired into in these last days before Texas was to be born as a State.

"Yuh must have plenty reason." He spoke slowly. "I have, too. Yuh've just seen—what yuh've seen. This place ain't so far from Bexar, not if we're not stopped. But we will be. Don't know how yuh got this far from the port, but if yuh want to come along as far as I'm goin', always supposin' it's yore way too, that yuh don't mind ridin' with a killer" —there was bitterness in his voice—"and can take orders, then come aboard. We're startin' in less than five minutes. . . ."

Once they were on the trail, Mike Tawn remembered that he didn't know the girl's name; knew nothing about her. She had stood up like a thoroughbred to that ugly scene in the stables, though, and she had not been afraid of anything she was facing, had looked without fear on what lay ahead.

While he drove, not looking at her, he told himself that her eyes reminded him of brook violets, but maybe that was because of the long lashes shadowing them. Her lips were red and every time she moved he noticed her unaffected grace.

After a while he said:

"You haven't told me yore name, or if yuh did I forgot."

"Why, I thought I told you when I first spoke to you—so brazenly!" she said. "Maybe you forgot. My name is Keryse—Constance Keryse." She flashed a quick sideward look at him. "I wonder if you've heard the name before. Keryse, I mean."

It took him a long time to answer and his profile, granite-hewn against the

growing yellow sunlight, was unreadable.

"Yes," he said at last. "Wife of Raoul Keryse mebbe?"

"If you know him—of him—" her words came slowly but distinctly, carefully—"Raoul Keryse is not my husband. His father and my mother were married a year after my father's death. I was away at school at the time, in Richmond. You don't like him?"

"No," he replied, "I don't like him. Neither does any Texas man. Raoul Keryse is up to his neck causing trouble for the Lone Star."

"You sound like a Texan, Mr. Tawn."

"I'm a Carolinian, miss. That is, I was. Now—yes, I reckon I'm Texan now. I want to see the Lone Star shine bright."

CHAPTER II

Errand For The Lone Star

THE flimsy wagon, derelict even though it was the best to be had, jolted on. The roads hardly deserved that name. That there were trails at all was due to men who had gone ahead, men who had sought land in a territory that was battling for admission into the Union, and freedom. But statehood was distant as yet and the powerful Mexican Government still used the boundary dispute as a cause for hostilities—to be backed with armies and money and equipment.

Northward, men had already settled on *ranchos*. Westward, men had discovered that there was wealth in cotton, and had squatted. And in California *Baja* another fight was in progress, a fight for independence under the Bear Flag. But on the heels of the foremost of the pioneers had come others with carpet-bags in their hands, avid-eyed, eager, bent on turning sweat and tears and courage into profit.

"They've begun to fight," Constance Keryse said quietly.

"They began some time back, miss," Michael Tawn said proudly. "Depends on what help they get, now they've said they're free."

"And this place,—San Antonio de Bexar—it's where we're going?" the girl asked, her voice faltering a little.

"I'll drop yuh off wherever yuh say," he told her. "Like I told yuh, we ain't so far from Bexar right now, with a free road — which we haven't got. Bexar's where I'm headed but I don't expect to get there this trip. Too many want to stop me. Because I'm on an errand for the Lone Star."

Involuntarily her eyes flashed backward to the almost empty wagon in which they were riding. In it were some leather pouches, a canvas bag or two. But scarcely anything else. As though he read her thought he flashed her a twisted grin.

"No, miss," he said, "this here wagon could never hold what I'm bringin' to Bexar. That's in my brain, mostly, though some of it is in the papers I carry. And guns are between here and there. The *Mejicanos* ain't bad hombres. I like a lot of 'em. But there's so-called *Americanos* workin' in with some *malo* hombres from the other side who have a big stake in seein' that Texas don't get free. Their money is in the big land grants, and a lot of it is invested in Mexico. I ain't carryin' anything with me, except what yuh can see — some medical supplies and a few guns. But I am drivin' through to pick up stuff I bought in New Orleans and had shipped. It went ahead by mules. I'm pickin' it up and drivin' it to where I think it'll do the most good. I've also got papers that'll get more supplies I pulled in but can't carry with me. They'll have to send men back for 'em. Guns, medicines, cash. That fight at Bexar ain't goin' to put an end to this battlin', no matter how it comes out."

"The supplies, then?"

"They're safe, unless they can stop me. When I get to where I'm goin' I can start 'em on the way, hirin' drivers if I can get 'em. And I can. They're waitin' for me. I can't carry much here and Sam Houston's men can't come to get em. They're too busy. Then supplies'll get through." He added grimly, "If I do."

Then abruptly he turned to her and she could see the ruthlessness in his eyes.

"So this Keryse must be kind of a half-brother of yours," he said. "That it? Yuh trust him?"

"I wouldn't be here if I trusted him completely," she answered. "Now I don't think I trust him at all. But he—he has

some land he bought for me. North. The last of my money is in it."

"Land," Michael Tawn echoed. "Yes, land." He waved a hand toward the horizon. "That's all the Lone Star."

There was something primitive about him, the girl thought, something that she could feel instinctively must be unassailable even to her. She was accustomed to the effect of her own charms. Yet this man Tawn, even though he had talked to her a little, seemed impervious.

She was sure that there was coolly frank admiration in his eyes when he regarded her, but that was all. The same eyes were fixed on some remoter star. Perhaps on what he had just spoken of—the Lone Star.

It could be that there was something greater than men and women in this new land. Tawn seemed to sense it. She felt she was beginning to.

She had come, discounting the danger her beauty might involve in a raw wilderness—which was what the Texas territory was to a New Orleans girl—willing to match her wits with anyone in a big gamble. Now, nearing Bexar with every beat of the galloping hoofs of the team of sturdy bays, she believed she understood the things this Mike Tawn was trying to put into words.

AFTER a long time, when dusty miles had unspooled behind them, he drew his team up under a sparse thinning of cottonwoods margining the trail, to drink. He stepped down to roll and light a *cigarillo*—the kind the Mexicans used, in brown paper.

"If I am strong enough to claim it—this land from Raoul Keryse—I will have a lot of it," she volunteered.

He nodded. "All the land north of the Rio Grande won't be worth a possum's brush unless we win after Bexar. I'll leave yuh off on the way. Where I'm goin' is no place for a woman."

"Where?"

He looked at her with a cold regard, his eyes gray as slate.

"I'm finishin' up at Bexar," he said at last. "But from all the rumors, I'll be late. I wanted to be with Travis but he told me old Sam Houston had another need for me and that's why I'm where I am. I don't think, now, I'll get there in time for the fight, but I'll be in the next one." An odd smile crossed his dark face. "You think I'm givin' things away? No! I put up my own *dinero* for goods waitin' ahead of us—I sent 'em on under cover—and the *Tejanos* will be able to use 'em. If not now, later. Big guns, little guns, ammunition, medical supplies from New Orleans. They're safe when I get wagons to pull 'em out. I'm playin' my whole string along with Texas."

She got down when he reached up a hand for her, and moved toward the clear water beside which he had drawn up. He gave her a tin cup and a bar of soap, turned away while she freshened up.

When she returned to the wagon she saw that he had released the horses from their shafts and had led them to water a good piece downstream. Now he was slowly backing them into their places. His eyes squinted at the sun. His pistol hung low at his side and he let his hand move with an almost caressing motion over the carbine in back of the seat. Turning, he smiled a little.

"Ready?" he asked. "We make a *fonda* name of Mescalero come nightfall. Might even be possible for yuh to find a place to sleep if yuh don't mind open air." He added quickly, "Where was yuh fixin' to meet up with this Keryse hombre?"

She looked at him gravely, steadily. "A little place called Mescalero," she said. "It's my understanding that he makes a kind of headquarters there and comes in for what post there is."

As he handed her back up into her place he commented:

"*Si!* And he also meets his friends there. Brokenshaw, and Aranjas.. Also one of their biggest agents from the East, name of Lansing. You saw 'em, back in that stable. All diggin' their fingers deep into the barrels of gold pourin' out from the other side of the Grande—but not for love of Mexico; for the love of what they've been promised. Land grants. The grants ain't in this territory, but Mexico has promised 'em, wherever they are. Some are here, too. It's a long-range warfare."

Then they were on the road again, jolting and jouncing, and they did not speak for some time. Tawn was peering ahead into a thick haze crowding the rolling hills and the spindle of trail when he heard her say: "I think—maybe you know it, Mr. Tawn—but there are horsemen behind us."

He did not take his eyes off the road. He just nodded.

"Expected 'em. Hoped we might sight Mescalero first. It'll be a fight. Brokenshaw's bunch, no doubt. Reach down and get that rifle up here for me. There's a bandolier too." His tone was calm.

She did as he directed and the wagon rolled on. Presently a dust cloud materialized in their wake. Through it at intervals three horses could be glimpsed.

"You asked for this," Tawn said briefly. "They want what they think I've got but they know the only way they can get it is to stop me. The stuff's at Mescalero, but they won't believe it. Mebbe that half-brother of yores is with 'em."

"Can I—help?" she asked falteringly.

He nodded, his eyes still on the road. "Yeah. See that my guns are kept loaded. I can't afford to miss any shots—and I can shoot. That's one of the things they don't like about me."

"They've stopped trailing us!" she said suddenly. "They're gone!"

He swore under his breath, squinted at the sun. The horses were giving their best.

"Off the road!" he bit out.

"They disappeared after that last dip," she said.

He nodded grimly. "I savvy," he said. "They had lookouts. From somewheres ahead they caught some signal. We won't have to run from 'em now. They'll be cuttin' over and waitin' for us ahead. Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless the signal meant somethin' else. This territory is patrolled by *Mejicanos* too—they still claim it. *Y como!*" he concluded grimly.

SHE had no opportunity to say more. From the distance the sound of firing broke out clearly, distinctly. Tawn's hand brushed his holstered pistol. He gripped the reins hard. The whip flashed out. The horses jerked into greater speed but they were lathered under the hot sun, even though they had rested. The girl clutched the edge of the seat and swayed.

Then with no warning they were in a pitched battle!

Three men in the green uniform of Mexican Rurales had backed their mounts into the partial shelter of a brief and shallow ravine where a stream appeared, only to vanish under the white thread of the trail. Chinaberry and cottonwoods sheltered the place and the froth of the stream was white.

Four riders broke into view, waving their rifles and firing as they came, spurring downslope toward the men in uniform. Tawn's eyes took fire. He thrust the reins into Constance's hands, slipped to the wagon step and leaped into white dust, rifle in hand.

It swirled around him, hiding him. Constance sawed at the reins. The horses finally came to a trembling stop, as the sound of firing came sharper and in more volume.

Tawn ducked under a cottonwood limb and emerged seconds later behind a small party of horsemen, the men who had been behind him. They had temporarily abandoned pursuit of his vehicle and were concentrating a ragged fire on a small group of Mexican *soldados.*

It was nothing unusual to find Mexican troops in the vicinity. Boundary lines were still being fought over, and there was no recognized line of neutrality.

The snarl of rifle and roar of pistol fire seemed everywhere. Tawn threw himself behind a big rock and looked to his priming.

He found a target, but not among the Mexicans, who were being driven back. He knew well enough that this attack on uniformed men was being made by renegades. He hated renegades, of any race. One uniformed man lay with his face toward the tree fringe and a trickle of blood ran down his cheek.

Tawn took careful aim. He fired.

Instantly the attackers broke free, staring rearward like a bloodthirsty pack of hounds menaced from a place they had thought safe. Tawn jammed a new cartridge home, fired again.

A man went spinning earthward.

CHAPTER III

Trail "Hotel"

FOR an instant, the Mexicans were startled. Then they saw that the new fire was not being directed at them.

A sharp command came. The soldiers broke from their precarious cover and came rushing toward their besiegers.

Tawn again took careful aim. He hoped to see Brokenshaw over his sights, but Brokenshaw was not there. He should have known, he told himself. That big New Orleans gambler would never be in any van. Neither, he thought, would the renegade Keryse.

Just as Tawn fired again, the Mexican troopers with wild yells, went charging across the open, bayonets flashing. Behind them a cool voice in resonant Spanish—not the Spanish of the Border *paisanos*—rallied them. They came on.

Guns roared and crashed. Tawn saw one of the ambushers stagger from the center of his group as a bayonet flashed. The man had located Tawn and was aiming for him with bayonet and guns, eyes wildly red and menacing.

Tawn arose. They met.

When the smoke cleared away lazily, Tawn straightened, and called out across the body of his fallen enemy:

"Finish, *amigo! Aqui!*"

For a moment all that Constance could see was patterning late sunlight as it fell across the shoulders of two men. One of them was Tawn. The other wore the uniform of an officer in the Mexican Rurales. He was slender and handsome, and had a small black mustache.

The two were talking as they came slowly back to Tawn's wagon, as unconcerned as though those furious seconds of gunplay had never been. Constance Keryse's fists were tightly balled when they halted below her. The Mexican officer swept off his hat with a flourish and the late sun glinted against his shining black hair.

"This is my friend, Lieutenant Federico Miranda of the Mexican Government Rurales, senorita," Tawn said evenly. "You will remember that we stopped here to try to collect news of what was happening at Bexar."

His audacity shook her. Here was a Mexican officer, and this soil was Texas, and there was war. It was not as yet officially declared, but even so it was war. The Lone Star had proclaimed her freedom and asked for admission into the Union. In the East men were girding to storm a neighbor state because of cruelty, and waging outlaw warfare. General Cos and the man already called the "Butcher"—Santa Anna of the wooden leg—were surrounding Bexar. Yet here was this Tawn calling a Mexican "friend."

"And did you have news of—of San Antonio de Bexar?" Constance managed to stammer.

The Mexican made a bow. "I regret it is bad," he murmured. "Bad for you. Bad for me, I think. I was born in Mexico and my life is there. But my mother was from New Orleans. My father was a soldier and he made a soldier of me, so when they tell me my land has declared Texas an enemy state, I must do my duty. My duty just now is this patrol. Those — renegades — my friend has just assisted in exterminating, they were enemies to both sides. They were of the land wolves! The carrion who feed off the bodies of brave men who die for either cause. They hoped to ride me down because I—" He stopped.

"Because," Tawn continued for him calmly, "Lieutenant Miranda has made it clear that he will have no share in what some of his countrymen—and a number of ours—are trying to do here in Texas. If they had managed to silence him and his patrol on this side of the Border it would have been another 'incident.'"

"My government has not yet recognized that this land is anything but her property." Miranda shrugged.

"It would seem," Constance said carefully, "that if those men of whom you speak really wanted freedom badly enough, they would be in Bexar or trying to help, not here on the road."

Tawn's eyes flashed at her. He smiled. "And to think that I was carryin' the idea right along," he said, "that yuh'd never understand! You'll do to ride the river with!"

Miranda turned to him, a little puzzled. Tawn grinned at him as he climbed into the wagon, settled in the seat, and gripped the reins.

"Mebbe you don't understand either, *amigo,*" he said to Miranda, "even though we have been friends for a long time. *De nada!* Just a few seconds ago, though, a new *Tejana* was born! *Vaya con Dios!*"

He drove away.

WHEN he and Constance were pushing over the road again he asked:

"Yuh said yuh was meetin' this Keryse hombre, near here?"

"Yes. I said Mescalero." She smoothed down her crinoline and adjusted her bonnet. "That is, if—"

"But Mescalero's not safe, not safe at all," he assured her. "Not for you. Nor for me either. It's the place where the land-grab *pelados* meet. It's just ahead, but we're pullin' in before we get there while I go to scout the *cuidad*."

She did not protest. She glanced into the back of the wagon. What he had said was true. He was not carrying much in the way of supplies for the embattled Texans—only a half-score rifles in wrappings, some pistols, encased in oily cloths, a dozen or so boxes of ammunition, and a large crate of what appeared to be medical supplies. The smell of antiseptics reached her.

A faint light was showing ahead through a haze that had been with them for the past hour or more. It might have been part of a faroff dust cloud, but the haze was beginning to blot into premature dusk.

Once he said, as he fought the team over a bad patch of road:

"I may get a couple of horses at Mescalero. *Quien sabe?* But my real business there, like I told yuh, is to pick up my men and pull out to Bexar with the supplies I've sent ahead."

"Will Raoul Keryse be there, do you think?" she ventured.

"In the vicinity, anyway. He'll be around, with the rest of the carrion crew. That'll mean Brokenshaw and big Lansing, his *segundo*, and Aranjas and Salcedo. Mebbe not all of 'em. They got a lot of territory to cover. But if the news comin' from Bexar is as bad as it seems to be—well, this is a short hop.

"Travis is holed up there and General Houston's holdin' off, don't know why. Mebbe he don't like the smell of a trap, or mebbe Travis was too hotheaded for him. Mebbe it's the guns he's waitin' for. I'll settle if I make it near to Goliad."

"But there was a battle at Goliad!" cried Constance.

"Yeah, and we got ourselves plumb beat. But the fight's rolled away from there now."

He leaned ahead to peer through the dusk. The pallid light against the dull sky was becoming brighter, and he commenced searching the sides of the trail for cover. The horses were wearied. Constance said nothing until he turned abruptly off the road and sent the team lurching through shaggy underbrush toward a clump of trees. When he pulled in, his passenger was clinging tightly to the side of the seat.

He smiled. "This'll be yore hotel," he said, "till I get in to Mescalero and pick up some savvy. Then we'll know."

Efficiently, he went about making a crude sort of camp. He loosed the horses and tethered them with generous lead ropes, close to the water, downstream. Slashing brush, he fashioned a rude lean-to. The sky had become clear, and as he looked up at it he decided against the chance of rain.

Dragging blankets from the wagon, he spread them over some chopped-off boughs. Finally he drew a square of canvas over the shelter—a wide piece of tarpaulin—and turned his attention to the construction of a small fire, after first piling stones carefully.

He tossed a pack of provisions on the grass, recovered a battered coffee pot and a can of sugar, and went about preparing a meal. It was not a bad repast. Even before it was ready Constance found herself anxious for the crisp bacon in the pan, and the smell of coffee was stimulating.

She watched him when he went back to the wagon he had driven into bush and pulled out a rifle and a bandoleer of ammunition. He laid these down with extreme care.

"You won't be bothered," he told her softly. "This is just in case. Douse the fire before yuh turn in. I'll be back within two hours."

"You're going afoot?"

"Yes. Shoot at anything that comes near — yuh can't go wrong! — unless you're shore it's me! I got to make Mescalero and get them supplies started. Also that information I told yuh about."

She nodded. He looked at her quizzically for a moment, then stalked off. She heard his progress up the dry wash sloping from the road, then silence settled over the wilderness awesomely.

Constance pulled the blankets up over her, and as she lay back she was aware, for the first time in weeks, of a sense of warmth and security. As she dozed off, she wondered if the warmth was because of what he had said to the Rurales

officer: "Just a moment ago, another *Tejana* was born. . . ."

MESCALERO was a small, sprawling flea-ridden community which could hardly rank as a town. Once it had been a notorious rendezvous for men illicitly pushing cattle and horses in both directions. It had been a meeting place for the first frontiersmen who had talked of independence from Mexico when such a thought was madness. But in the years that had followed it had come to be a dark place, frequented by spies and outlaws from both sides.

It boasted two saloons, one at either end of the dark main street which made up most of the town. There was a livery stable and a tumbledown hotel, both dark now, but a lantern burned in the rear of the livery. Both the bars were lighted.

At the one nearest the stables Michael Tawn halted, then went in. He crossed to the bar and leaned across it to speak.

"La Cruz!' he said. "Are they here?"

The barman cocked a bleary wall-eye, as he made motions as of wiping his hands.

"I will let them know," he said in an undertone. Then louder: "Whisky, senor?"

"Yes, if there's any fit to drink," Tawn said, and the bottle was pushed in front of him.

He poured and let silver ring on the bar top. He rolled a *cigarillo* and looked around the low-ceilinged, smoke-ridden room as his palm brushed the long gun against his thigh.

Four men stood at the bar, at the farther end. One was a Mexican, one was probably a half-breed, the others frontiersmen, judging by their garb. They took no apparent notice of him.

The bartender had shuffled to the rear, bare feet scraping in straw sandals; now he returned. He looked at Tawn, nodded slightly, but did not approach. At that instant a shout came from the darkened street, then the sound of horses being reined in, a shot at the sky. The bartender shrugged, but his four customers took no notice. Tawn turned to regard his cheap *aguardiente.*

He was not drinking it. It was little better than raw *tequila,* flavored with a poor variety of corn alcohol.

A man came in, alone. He wore a kind of star. He also wore a mustache of great length which did not, however, quite conceal a loose, flabby mouth stained by tobacco. Behind him came another man, like a shadow. Mike Tawn looked up then idly, thoughtfully.

The eyes of the man wearing the shabby star were on him. Nor did the shadow's eyes move from him. Tawn understood. The bartender had passed the word that he was in town. He had come to let his friends know he was back and ready for the cargo, but this must mean further treachery. The barkeep had passed the word all right, but he had never left the place, so his messenger must be in the pay of the men who were bargaining over the sale of a bleeding Texas for their own gain. It spelled trouble.

But even so, his friends would know he had appeared. That might not do a lot of good if he were downed here and now. But he didn't intend to be. He was up against long odds, but Mike Tawn had known odds before. If his friends knew he had arrived that would be enough. They would pass the word. The rest was his own lookout.

With the thought in his mind he stood twisting the empty glass until he heard, behind him:

"D'yuh recognize the hombre, Keryse?"

CHAPTER IV

Mescalero Town

SWIFTLY Tawn swung about. He saw Raoul Keryse fully for the first time—a tall, handsome man with a weakly petulant mouth that spoke of self-indulgence. He had slanting eyes under eyebrows that slanted, too, and was dressed in the most dapper fashion, wearing a wide white hat with only the suggestion of a crease in the crown, long burnsides, a black tie and soft silk shirt under a short coat. Raoul Keryse's black trousers were tucked into high-heeled black boots, polished and spurred.

The man who evidently represented what law there was in Mescalero came closer to Tawn, to peer at him blearily

"I'm Smith," he announced flatly. "Law Smith they call me—marshal and sheriff and everything else this purty

little town of ours has in the law line. Heard tell somebody come in here mentionin' *'La Cruz!'"*

Tawn gave a slight nod. He had shoved his glass back, but he still had his fingers curved around the *aguardiente* bottle in front of him. He turned only slightly.

"I heard the same thing," he murmured.

Keryse moved in swiftly, heavy and dark-faced.

"Were you lookin' for somebody by that name maybe? Funny name—'The Cross'!"

Tawn shook his head. "Not lookin' for anything special," he said, "nor anybody. Left a couple cayuses here three weeks back and thought I'd stop by and pick 'em up. They got my brand on 'em —Circle Cross. Mebbe that's where the *'Cruz'* come from. I got a livery receipt in my pocket. After I tend to that chore I'm headin' on again."

"Ah! In what direction, Mr.—"

Ignoring the implied invitation Tawn countered, "Anywhere the idea takes me. Hear there's trouble south. So I'll not go that way, I reckon. There's land north, though, unclaimed even by the Mexicans. Might take a look at it."

"They's free land only for them as earns it," "Law" Smith stated flatly.

"The grants, yuh mean? Ain't they still open?"

Keryse stirred, his eyes slitting. He stepped nearer.

"They will be, mister," he said curtly. "For the men on the right side."

The men at the far end of the bar, evidently Keryse's henchmen moved in too. Tawn turned fully and allowed his elbows to rest on the bar edge. The bottle was close to his left hand.

"I aim to be on the right side," he drawled. Then he asked Keryse suddenly, "Who told you hombres I was here?"

The lawman looked at Keryse. Keryse looked at one of the four men who had come up to stand beside him. He said softly, "This here gent is known as Big Lansing. Maybe you've heard of him along the line. He discovered about a week back what the right side had to be. He's on it now. Savvy?"

Tawn nodded slowly. "I do now," he said. "And Brokenshaw? And his pard Salcedo, one time *gobernador* of this district, till he began to smell so bad even his own crowd wouldn't stand him? Must be a right big passel of country, this Texas, if there's enough room left in it to slice it up with all that lot!"

He tightened at a snarl from "Big" Lansing. Just in time. Lansing's right hand was darting for the Frontier Colt in its bulky sheath, hung too high for Tawn's taste.

Tawn's fingers closed easily over the bottle neck and as he bent forward he half turned to let it explode over his whirling shoulder. The butt of the bottle struck Lansing between the eyes—hard. Lansing cursed, staggered, groped blindly for the bar edge.

A shot blazed. Overhead the swinging lantern exploded at the end of its chain. Tawn saw two twisting figures ahead of him in the semidark.

Crimson shot from the muzzle of Keryse's gun, but the lead went wild. The self-styled sheriff brought up his weapon, but Tawn's long pistol beat it to the snarl by a breath. Smith went backward, bouncing past Keryse.

Tawn leaped. He smashed with the flat of his gun at Keryse's face, shouldered on. His left elbow caught Keryse in the throat and Keryse went staggering backward, gagging. Tawn again slammed a second blow with his weapon, and Keryse went floorward on his knees.

A shot came, but Tawn was past it. He made the doorway and dodged into the street, a street suddenly becoming alive, like a drunken man who has had cold water abruptly dashed into his face.

Shots were coming first, with loud cries and oaths. Men popped in and out of doorways, alleys. Tawn drew up for bare seconds. He knew that mob was about to converge on him. He spied an alley across from where he had halted, and zigzagged across for its shelter. A man blocked his path, crouching. A pistol gleamed. Tawn fired.

The man went down, falling forward.

Tawn vaulted the crumpling body and kept on. He dived into the gloom of the alleyway, marking the location of the stables as he rounded the rear of the false-front structures that lined the main street. He reloaded as he ran. Behind him the town was in violent uproar.

Flares painted the sides of the crude buildings. They even stained the row of low adobes behind the main thoroughfare with their color.

MIKE Tawn brought up. A knot of men had come to a halt between him and the rear of the stables, blocking his way. They would not be friends. He would no longer trust even those he believed allies here. Behind him a wild cry sounded. He darted into the alley and came out front again.

Down the dusty street a wagon came careening. Tawn dug in his heels and stared. It was his own wagon! And there, lighted weirdly by gun flashes, standing erect in the seat, reins in one hand and rifle in the other, was Constance Keryse!

He swung out into the open, tried to wave her away from the line of firing. But the firing was erratic and she might not have understood his signal. She came on.

Two men darted for him. He shot. The first man shouldered sideward into a companion and both went down heavily just as the wagon, in the center of its own dust-cloud, screeched past.

"Jumped on!" Tawn heard, and he jumped.

He landed in the back and the wagon bumped on. Shots screamed after him, and high-pitched, vengeful yells. He picked himself up and, cursing, fought his way over the pitching bottom of the vehicle to where he could wrench the reins from the slim but capable hands controlling them. He heard Constance gasping:

"I got scared—waiting!"

"Yeah," he breathed grimly, fighting the frightened team into a straighter course. "Yuh shore scare easy! Get down there out of the line of fire! These hombres are after blood—mine mostly, but bullets don't know the rules!"

She obeyed him meekly. As he fought the frightened team he understood why. She was busy reloading the firearms in the rear. Across his taut face crept a slow grin.

Behind them, pursuit set out. Tawn lashed his horses past the edge of town, turned. Illumination rimmed the settlement's edge. Through the darkness glowed the crimson of firearms. The clatter of hoofs came in their wake.

"All right now," he said quietly. "If yuh can make it up to the seat here I'll just drop back and try to discourage 'em."

Constance's hand slid across his as it gripped the reins. He threw himself backward and his grip caught a rifle. He twisted, rolled to the rear of the wagon and waited.

He had not long to wait. The vanguard of the pursuit was coming up swiftly, more swiftly than the swaying wagon could cover the trail. He braced both elbows against the jolting and took aim carefully. When he fired a blotched streak cut across the dusk and a rider went swaying and tumbling from saddle. The men with him pulled in, cursing.

Tawn fired again. He could see his pursuers in a cluster and a grin scored his streaked face.

The pursuit pulled in a little. But as Tawn groped his way back to the seat of the wagon and took the reins from Constance's cold hands, he was aware that it was only the stern chase that had been halted, that the same danger lay ahead.

He flicked the whip and his team responded. The wagon rolled down a steep declivity shrouded in shadow. The moon was passing under some clouds. Constance's voice was in his ear.

"Where are we headed—now?"

"Final destination's still Bexar," he barked at her grimly. "But there's a way stop. I happen to know where this *junta* of ours hangs out—a 'dobe off the main road. Raoul Keryse and the rest of 'em should be there. I'm going to—"

He broke off. From the side of the trail came twin spurts of yellow and crimson flame. Dazed, he shoved the girl back to partial cover and reached for his rifle, disregarding his sheathed pistol.

Another shot came. He could use only one hand, for he wasn't going to let Constance take the reins again. The danger to her now meant more than his own peril, though he always discounted that. He understood why those men wanted her, and he was fairly sure they would not harm her or shoot her, for they would need her alive. Even so a wild shot might get her, for their shooting was not accurate. Meantime they had to stop him by any means, which made it bad for his companion, whoever that might be.

He saw a rider coming in from an angle toward the horses, another close behind him, while a third ranged off as if to cover some proposed action. He jockeyed the rifle under his right armpit and, twisting, fired.

A man went tumbling earthward, and dust erupted from his fall. Another rider pressed on. Tawn fired again. A wild scream came—a Texas yell.

STILL another man tumbled but even as Tawn saw that his own wild shot had amazingly gone home he realized that one of their shots had found him. The stunning glare of flame seemed right in his eyes, like a blazing comet. He could feel his fingers loosen as he felt the burn across his forehead, the wetness across his eyebrows. A paralyzing weakness was forcing him to slip sideward, but he was still conscious.

He was slipping from the seat; he knew that. But his eyes were open and his faculties with him. He dimly saw the single rider who was pacing the wagon drawing in closer. In moments he would be at the man's mercy—and the rider was Raoul Keryse!

The girl? No, they wouldn't harm her yet. And he was still alive. And he wanted to remain alive, not only because of his unfinished purpose, but for her.

He grinned a death's-head grin, summoned the reserves of strength that surged in back of the numbing paralysis flooding him, and lurched free.

His right foot launched him outward and when he landed it was to twine his arms about the man on the roan pacing the wagon. He and the rider described a parabola, to hit the dust of the trail, while the wagon went careening on its crazed way. The saddle horse went galloping off frenziedly.

The shouts and yells receded. Mike Tawn found himself in a death grapple with a slight, but sinewy antagonist. Eyes aflame, dust gritting in his mouth, his fist came up.

Through a red mist tinted by moonlight he caught another glimpse of his antagonist's face. Even as he moved his head sluggishly to avoid a blow, he brought up his right fist from his knees.

"Keryse!" he taunted. "Raoul Keryse, the *renegado!*"

His fist jammed upward, some of the strength he thought he had lost lending the fury of anger to his blow. His left forearm, bearing down across Keryse's throat, dug in but it still felt numb, and there was numbness in one leg.

But Keryse's head snapped back, his eyes taking on a haze. Blood dripped from Tawn's mouth, ran down his face, distorting it. But a moment later, gasping, panting, he had straddled the limp body of Constance Keryse's half-brother.

He drew back slowly, tasting alkali, pulling in air gratefully. For a long time the gups he inhaled cost him pain.

He looked down. Keryse was still alive, but unconscious — a tall, slender man with the features of a poet, long-lashed closed eyelids, and arched brows. Tawn's own eyelids closed, his knees buckled, and he dropped beside the renegade.

CHAPTER V

The Right Side

WHEN Tawn's eyes opened, slowly, painfully, he was still gulping for air. His first conscious realization was that the wagon, and Constance, were gone. Keryse must have realized that, too, for he groaned and gasped:

"Diablo!"

Tawn grinned a grimace twisted by blood. "Yuh called it the first time! I'm thinkin' neither of us will leave this spot alive, Keryse. But we both savvy that."

He wavered to his feet. Every muscle ached. His body was alive with pain. Keryse lay in the trail staring up at him, a sorry spectacle, blood-smeared, broken, white-faced. Only the dark eyes shone with a suggestion of defiance. Then, as Tawn's breath came back slowly, Keryse managed:

"You've—lost, anyway—haven't you, Tawn?"

Michael Tawn flicked a glance toward the roadway, empty and deserted under the moonlight. Reluctantly he nodded.

"I've lost — almost everything," he said. "So has Texas, maybe, which is more. But I aim to pay off what I can with what I have left in me." And his eyes, yellow-balled as a hunter wolf's, returned to Raoul Keryse. "You—almost a brother of hers—you sold her out for the price you aimed to bleed from the heart of Texas! You're not going to die easy, Keryse!"

"I swear it wasn't that way, Tawn!" Keryse cried, and stumbled on, "You—you're in the way. I admit that. You

could've stopped us. But not her. I swear—"

"Yuh'll swear on yore father's grave if yuh thought it'd bring yuh a plugged peso, Keryse!" Tawn said in an emotionless voice. "Well, yore gang of renegades has got her now. You led 'em—Brokenshaw, Salcedo, Aranjas and the rest. Or yuh thought yuh led 'em, but they were only usin' yuh. Yuh haven't stopped me yet but . . . Why were they satisfied to get away with just her? I've come to think she's pretty fine, Keryse, but still . . . Well, why did they leave you here? And leave me, without makin' shore I was dead?"

"A Mexican patrol has been on our heels all day," Keryse said sullenly. "They passed on, but Brokenshaw wasn't waiting to find that out, so he was in a hurry. And they must have believed you were done for anyway."

"And you?"

"I don't think they worry too much about me," Keryse mumbled. "I'm beginning to understand that now."

Tawn smiled. "That patrol—Miranda! Yore bunch knew Miranda was poison to em! They tried to ambush him. *Bueno!* Account squared!"

"What does that mean?" Keryse lifted his head a little.

Tawn turned on him, snarling. "Do you know what they want with her? Enough so they passed up makin' shore of me?"

"They want her land rights. I acted as a kind of agent for her, bought a lot of land for her northward. But beyond where the war will be fought. Safe land. I—I hoped to convince her that it would be best to throw in with me. There's a lot of loose land for those on the right side."

"There shore is," Tawn agreed grimly. "Only you didn't pick the right side. But since yuh're not around to—what did yuh call it?—'convince her,' what next? For her, I mean?"

Keryse turned away tortured eyes. "You've got to believe me! I didn't mean harm should come to her."

"And no harm to me either?"

"You're in the way, Tawn. I told you so. We know you've got supplies for those *Tejanos* at Bexar. We know you're preparing to pick them up somewhere. If you don't pick them up they won't get there, which means that much less time for this stupid revolt to run on."

Tawn nodded gravely. Then his eyes gleamed.

"Do you want to prove that you wouldn't want Constance to come to harm?"

The answer came quickly. "Yes—yes!"

"Then let's us take a *pasear* to where they are. Yuh can settle yore personal business with her if we find her. Mebbe she'll see it yore way—if yuh live!"

Keryse came scrambling to his feet. In the strange light his eyes were wild, like an animal's. He looked hard at Tawn.

"I was hoping you'd get around to that," he said. "Let's get going!"

* * * * *

THREE men sat close together in the low-ceilinged room which was all there was to the adobe house. A small fire glowed in a charred fireplace. On the table were bottles, tin cups, a water jug. Two candles reflected pale glimmerings on cobwebbed rafters overhead.

Of the trio Brokenshaw, the land speculator, was the most assured. He looked cool and in command. The others lacked his assurance. One of them, Diego Aranjas, was swarthy, nervous, and twitchy of mouth, a thin knifelike man with glistening black hair combed to his shoulders, and dandyish mannerisms. The other man was a long-mustached Yankee named Lawson.

"Might as well face facts," he was saying. "Big Lansing died after that fight. Keryse is gone, probably dead. Salcedo's finished. Them Rurales is still on the prowl. What's the next word, Broke?"

Brokenshaw slid cold eyes, eyes almost hidden by puffs of flesh surrounding them, to where Constance Keryse sat against the wall near the smoky fireplace. The fire had died out, but it still smoldered under its coals, and the room was hot and foul. She had not been bound, but the door was a long distance from her and the eyes of Diego Aranjas were on her, watchfully appraising.

They had told her at the beginning that he would welcome a struggle with her. She watched his hands, fascinated—puffy, immaculately white and beringed hands that still had strength.

Brokenshaw did not answer Lawson at once, and the Mexican put in:

"Who is to say that Keryse is dead?"

"He stayed back to tackle *El Tigre* by himself, didn't he?" the leader answered roughly. "Figgered to sail into him and get him to talk if he didn't have to kill him. Said it was one way, either way it come out, to stop the stuff Tawn's got readied for the south. If Raoul ain't dead now I bet he wishes he was. Last seen of him he was in the hands of Mike Tawn! And Tawn savvies plenty by now. That ain't goin' to make Raoul's dyin' easy if he *is* still alive."

He turned with a ponderous movement, and there was something sluggishly reptilian in the way his basilisk eyes regarded their prisoner.

"Reckon you know the story," he said. "At Bexar, the Alamo's done fell. Colonel Travis and his whole gang of freebooters wiped out. Houston ain't doin' nothin, only talkin'. Won't let his men move. The *Tejano* revolt done come a bust. Keryse—well, call him dead. You want to save what's left? Or do yuh think mebbe somethin' else would be better?"

"What else?" Constance asked in a breathless voice.

Brokenshaw's obsidian eyes slid to Aranjas. His thick lips twitched as he spoke to the Mexican.

"They tell me you're addin' to yore household down in Durango, Diego. Border's clear for us right now. Feel like takin' along a new piece of domestic help with yuh when yuh go back? Call it what yuh want. *Mestiza!* Chambermaid's as good as anything else!"

Aranjas wet his thick red lips. His eyes glowed. There was disgust behind Brokenshaw's hooded eyes as he turned his stare on the girl.

"Of course there's ways for yuh to get out of this," he said slowly. "Could of saved yoreself trouble in the first place, by throwin' yore interests in with Raoul Keryse's. He bought lots of land for yuh, usin' the money yuh sent him. It's still in yore name, though. That makes it complicated—out of the war zones too. Only Raoul didn't aim for yuh to be on the spot to claim it till you and him was spliced. How'd bein' Diego's wife suit yuh? He'll prove yore claims, and mebbe even this territory'll be Mexican pretty soon. Then yuh'd be a big lady."

Loathing fired Constance suddenly.

"Is this—this creature, Aranjas, big enough to kill Michael Tawn?" she flared angrily.

Aranjas cursed. "Tawn is alone now," he snarled, eyes gleaming hot. "Will he fight the world for what he thinks he wants. If he still lives?"

She nodded calmly. "Yes," she said. "Yes. I think perhaps he can—and will. He'd have got through to Bexar if it hadn't been for me. I was a fool to hamper him."

"No more words!" Brokenshaw snarled. "Make yore contract with Diego. We deal with him, share for share. If yuh don't like it that way, miss, yuh can go back across the Line and work with the other peons in his *casa*. He gets what he chooses either way. We," he added smoothly, "owe Diego a little. This will pay it off."

The door pushed open and a strange, curiously weak voice said:

"Pay-off? Yes. There has to be a pay-off."

Raoul Keryse stood there, white and wavering. At his side, where his right hand dangled, was a gun. He was staring out of hollow eyes at Brokenshaw, a fixed stare.

There came a thick curse. Lawson reached for a gun, but even as his hand moved Keryse was knocked aside as though from some tigerish blow, and Michael Tawn was in the doorway.

POWDERSMOKE began to sag across the room's drab smokiness. Lawson was the one to move first. He overturned the table and set the guttering illumination spilling away even as his gun unlimbered. In the wavering light from the smoldering fire the final duel was fought.

Keryse was slammed back against the doorsill by the second shot from the doorway. Brokenshaw brought up a gun at the same time as Lawson and the twin streaks of their fire blended.

Tawn staggered a little, aware that Lawson had a second weapon, but he brought up his own to level at Brokenshaw. Had it not been for Keryse he would not have plunged in this way. But Keryse had surprised him by forging ahead at the last instant, so he had to make the best of it. Lawson had his weapon up and it blazed, but its streak of flame seemed caught up to blend with a stream of fire from Keryse's hand.

Aranjas made a clumsy dive across the room, a knife in his hand gleaming

wickedly. He lunged at Tawn and Tawn's gun swiped in a downward motion toward the Mexican's head. There came a sound like that of an eggshell breaking. Aranjas sprawled on his face.

Brokenshaw was still staggering backward, and as Aranjas dropped, Lawson slumped forward across the table. His body extinguished the last candle and only the low firelight remained.

Gunsmoke still swirled in the room. Keryse cried out softly, and Constance sped across the gloomy room to him, cradling the head of her half-brother in her arms. Above them, Tawn stood swaying. Blood was dripping from his forearm and his loosening fingers, and his face was drained pale. But as he stared dully at Aranjas his eyes were alive.

He shook his head. "No use, Constance," he said, his voice thick. "Yore half-brother picked up the wrong cards. But he—he squared. . . ."

Daylight found the battered wagon again on the trail to Bexar. The sun coming up over a rim of low hills shouldered a sullen skyline. Tawn put his hand over the hand of the girl sitting beside him on the wagon seat and she returned the warm pressure, but her eyes were misty when she looked at him. He looked behind, saw dust rising from the line of eight canvas-topped wagons, loaded with supplies, trailing him. They had waited, in spite of all. He spoke gently.

"Look ahead, *querida mia!* Behind us are the guns that waited for me, the teams I had ready. For General Sam. The fight's only started. We're too late for the Alamo, but for the rest—Texas is just beginning."

She nodded. She didn't tell him—though she knew she would some day soon—that she also had won all she wanted, now. Tawn wouldn't have understood her saying that, she knew intuitively. Tawn was a fighting man.

Test Yore Western Knowledge!

HERE are six questions about the West. If you can get the plumb proper replies to four or more of them, you're a real top-hand. The right answers are given on Page 113—but DON'T LOOK FIRST. Now see if you can dab a loop on the correct responses!

1. The height of a horse is expressed by what units of measurement?
2. What are wet cattle?
3. How did Jim Bowie, originator of the famed Bowie knife, meet his death?
4. Who wrote "Smoky," perhaps the best known novel ever written about a Western horse?
5. Why was the Colorado River so named?
6. Do you know why the poker hand of aces and eights is known as the "dead man's hand"?

THE DEVIL'S BREED

The True Fact Story of the Notorious Yeager-Black Gang of Outlaws!

by **HARRY VAN DEMARK**

The outlaws were running for the shelter of the corral walls

IF GUS YEAGER, "Buck" Black and their gang of cutthroats and outlaws had been content to let well enough alone after sticking up the Stockman's National Bank at Kingfisher, Oklahoma, back around the turn of the century, they might still be plying their lucrative, if nefarious trade.

Of course, the odds would have been long against their reaching a ripe old age, but they were an accomplished pair of villains. Who can say they would not have strung along for years, surviving the perils of their profession, if they had stuck to bank robbing and hadn't pushed their luck?

Clockwork Precision

No one in Oklahoma would deny that Yeager and Black were top hands in the technique of reducing small-town banks to comparative poverty. That affair at Kingfisher, for instance, went off as smoothly as a well-rehearsed June wedding.

Yeager, followed by six hard-bitten

hombres whose pictures adorned the walls of just about every public building in the state—those "$5,000 reward, dead or alive" pictures—rode in at one end of the main street, just as Black, with another half-dozen unwashed guntoters came in at the other. At a prearranged signal they all thundered down the street, pulled their horses to their haunches in front of the bank and leaped from saddles.

Only three of the outlaw band—Yeager, Black and a man named George Fenton—entered the bank. The others deployed themselves to vantage points and swept the surroundings with a hail of lead that kept storekeepers and other business men from sticking their heads out of doorways or windows.

The town marshal and the county sheriff, eating dinner in their homes at the edge of town, heard the shooting and came running, buckling on their artillery as they came. But they arrived too late to take any part in the affair. It passed off too quickly.

The lone teller on duty in the bank lifted his eyes to peer into the business ends of three single-action .45s. They looked as big as cannons to him and he reached for the ceiling without being told. The vault stood open, and in less than three minutes the outlaws had swept some fifty thousand dollars in gold, silver and currency into sacks, and made their exit.

Too Much Ambition

Pouring lead into the buildings along the street, the robber band swept out of Kingfisher, leaving a broad trail toward the east. But the posse that was hastily formed came to a splitting of that trail. The spoors of the horses separated and branched off in all directions. The pursuit was soon washed up.

The Yeager and Black gang did not proceed far to the east. Some of them swung north across the Cimarron River, others moved south toward the north branch of the Canadian. Then they circled, rejoined ranks well to the west of Kingfisher, and loped their horses toward the northwest.

That brought them past the ranch of one "Dad" Roberts, who raised horses and cattle, and who was doing pretty well for himself and his little family. Right there Yeager and Black made their big mistake.

There were eight fine saddle broncs in Dad Roberts' corral when the outlaws rode up. Dad was out on the range and so was "Curley," the only son of the family. The outlaws took possession of the place. They forced Mrs. Roberts to cook them a meal, and when they had eaten and rested they rode away, taking the eight horses from the corral.

When Dad Roberts came in and learned what had happened he was pretty mad about the whole thing. It wasn't so much that they had eaten up several dollars' worth of his hard-earned provisions, nor that they had forced Mrs. Roberts to feed them. They had treated her politely, even though insistently, and ranchers of those days were used to feeding anyone who came along.

A Plenty Mad Rancher

Besides, they didn't look upon the capturing of outlaws as any part of their day's work. Live and let live was their motto, and as long as the outlaws let them alone they would stick to their own affairs and keep their mouths shut.

That went for bank robbers—but not for horse thieves or cattle rustlers! They were too much of a menace to honest ranchers to be allowed to live, and the Yeager-Black bunch had stolen Roberts' horses.

Dad Roberts was saddling a fresh horse when his son rode in. Curley was a tall, gangling lad, six-feet-two, and broad all over.

"Get yoreself a fresh cayuse, Curley," Dad said. "We're goin' for a ride."

It was not on the trail of the outlaws that they first rode, however. Instead, they galloped into Kingfisher. There they routed out the sheriff, and when they left town both of them were deputy sheriffs, authorized to pursue and kill desperadoes to their hearts' content.

Dad Roberts and Curley were in no hurry to search for their stolen horses. They had no idea of jumping the gang by themselves and fighting it out. The odds would be too great.

They carried on their regular work on the ranch, but whenever they could get a day or two off, they were away on the search. They followed trails of horses, and herds of cattle. And every time there was a bank stick-up within a radius of fifty miles, they were on the scene as soon as possible to follow the trail of the robbers.

After months of unrelenting search, and many disappointments, they discovered that many trails led in the same direction—toward the fastnesses of the Gloss Mountains, fifteen miles west of Fairview, Oklahoma, a wild, uninhabited region, well-fitted for an outlaw rendezvous. From then on the Gloss Mountains began to have a special attraction for Dad and his son.

Late one afternoon, while Dad and Curley were on watch, a cavalcade of horsemen rode out of a defile and galloped away across the prairie. Dad Roberts identified both Yeager and Black among the riders. And as soon as the outlaws had disappeared, Curley was in the saddle and riding as only a kid born in the cattle country can ride. Late that night the sheriff of Major County was roused from his bed in Fairview, the county seat, by a wild-eyed youth, riding a lathered, tired horse.

"Get a posse and come a-ridin' if yuh want to get Yeager and Black!" the boy informed the lawman.

No doubt about the sheriff wanting to get the notorious pair. Fairview had suffered from their incursions many times. Hastily he summoned three deputies and swore in six fighting townsmen.

Even so, the forces of the law were not equal to those of the outlaws, but five ranchers were added to the party on the way to the mountains. That evened the odds to a certain extent, and besides, the sheriff and his posse would have the element of surprise on their side.

Men in Waiting

A prearranged signal brought Dad Roberts out of concealment as the party neared the canyon's mouth. He told them that the outlaws were still outside on their raid. The horses of the posse were led away and concealed in a brush clump, and the sheriff and his men stole into the defile. Behind rocks on either side they took their stand.

Just as the first streaks of dawn were lighting the skies they heard the thud of many hoofs. First a bunch of stolen horses came galloping through the opening. Behind them was the full strength of the Yeager and Black outlaw band. The barrels of the posse's Winchesters were laid across the rocks ready for action.

"Freeze where yuh are!" rang out the voice of the sheriff. "Hands up!"

But this was no band to be captured without a fight. The order was answered by a blast of firing as the outlaws flung themselves from their horses and took cover in the brush at the bottom of the defile. Before they could reach shelter, however, four of them were stretched lifeless on the floor of the canyon.

Historic Battle

Then began a battle that is historic in the annals of Oklahoma badmen. Slowly the outlaws beat a retreat up the canyon, sliding from rock to rock, dodging behind stunted trees, snaking along the ground where there was little cover. The posse stayed on their tails relentlessly, saving their lead, but taking a snap shot whenever a head or a hand was visible.

A welter of sound flooded the defile. Resounding rifle shots sounded like cannon. Even the ping of bullets against the rocks was magnified many times.

To the accompaniment of this storm of noise, the outlaws slowly retreated. The posse was in no hurry. One of the members was familiar with this terrain, and he told the sheriff there was no way out of the canyon save the way they had entered. At its dead end, he said, there was a large cave, known to Indians for many years as "The Cave of the Bats."

Near the end, the canyon widened into quite a bowl. Undoubtedly, the old-timer informed the sheriff, Yeager and Black had constructed corrals for their stolen horses in the bowl and were using the cave to live in. His surmise proved correct.

Picking Them Off

Unfortunately for the outlaws there was little cover in the bowl. In one last frenzied volley, they filled canyon with lead, then ran for their stronghold. Two of them dropped under the fire of the posse. Two others were wounded, but made their way into the cave.

That hole in the rocks had been improved considerably by the outlaws. They had built a front wall of logs cut on the mountainside, leaving a door, two windows and a dozen loop-holes. The place was well fixed to withstand a siege.

Night fell, and still the battle raged. Through the moonlit hours the rattle of arms was continuous. There were few men among the posse who had not been nicked by bullets. Three were dead, and one had a shattered shoulder.

Then the moon went down and the defile was inky black. Young Curly Roberts stole over to the sheriff.

"I think I can smoke 'em out, Sheriff," he said and outlined a plan.

"Go to it," the sheriff agreed.

The boy gathered up an armful of straw and twigs. As the posse kept up a hot fusillade, Buck crept around one side of the bowl, keeping close to the precipitous wall. Arriving near the wooden barrier, he dropped to his knees and one hand, as he crawled silently toward his objective.

He held his breath as he stacked his fire materials against the wooden wall. This was a crucial moment. Could he light that pile without being shot to pieces?

Smoked Out

He pulled his big hat from his head and used it as a shield. Then he snapped the match with his thumbnail. It flamed into a blaze. He dropped the burning match into the pile of tinder and faded into the blackness, just as the sky began to lighten with the dawn. The straw and twigs leaped into a roaring fire and the logs that formed the front of the cave soon caught.

Now the outlaws were at a decided disadvantage. Suddenly the door of the stronghold flew open and five men, led by Yeager, made a sortie, running for the shelter of the corral walls.

None of them reached that haven. Yeager was the first to fall, fairly riddled with lead, while the others were stretched on the ground either dead or badly wounded. Black and the remaining bandits knew that the fight was over.

"We're licked, Sheriff!" called Black's voice through the eddying smoke and flames. "We're comin' out with our hands up!"

Twelve desperate men emerged from the burning wall, all treading stiffly, their hands in the air. One by one they were secured by the sheriff and his deputies. Then the possemen turned their attention to the cave.

World's Champions

When the fire had burned itself out, they entered. The hole in the rocks had been made into a regular home. There were shelves loaded with provisions and ammunition. Comfortable bunks lined the walls. A cook-stove had been set up, and its pipe run out through the front wall. In a chest they found over thirty thousand dollars in gold, silver and currency.

Dad and Curly Roberts did not recover their eight ponies. But their share of the rewards that had been placed on the heads of every member of the Yager-Black gang more than recompensed them for their loss.

Years later Curly Roberts became a well-known rodeo star. His leopard-skin chaps, known for years wherever Wild West contests were held, were presented to him in person by Theodore ("Teddy") Roosevelt. At Cheyenne, Pendleton, Calgary everyone knew Curly.

For over thirty years he rode bad horses and tossed his rope over steers. Nine times he was named World's Champion Cowboy. He had forked the worst of them—and come off winner.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

•

WASHED IN BLOOD

A Dramatic Range Action Novelet by A. LESLIE

KILLER, Here I Come

by ROBERT J. HOGAN

Bud Nemo, saddlemaker and veterinarian, has a way with animals, but his townsmen have him pegged as a weakling, until—

THE FACE under the wide-brimmed black hat was worried. The young man turned his blocky body and looked back for an instant, then he reined over before his place of business. It was situated between the barber shop and the feed store on Main Street, second door up toward the bank from Joe's Lunch. He could scarcely see the weatherbeaten sign above the door where it said BUD NEMO—SADDLER AND HARNESS MAKER. He couldn't see much of anything for the darkness and steady drizzling rain that hit like cold needles.

Bud Nemo got down, tied his buckskin to the hitching-rail and dragged his crippled foot to the door. There was an old, worn saddle and a double set of chain harness lying against the door. Bud unlocked the door, tossed in the saddle and the harness and turning, looked up Main Street again. He heard the clatter and clank he'd expected and waited in the rain.

That freighter wagon he'd passed coming into town was just rolling out of the Angel Valley Road into the Main Street of Hell's Basin. He waited, watching the lantern swing from the box of the big freight wagon, listening to the slap

of the lead bar and spreader and the clank of the tug chains. Then, as the four horses came sloshing through the black mud he turned and walked toward the teamster.

"That off lead horse," Nemo said, "I noticed coming by. He favors his right shoulder. Acts like he's got a collar blister spreading there."

The teamster was a tall, raw-boned man. He threw up his head from ducking the rain and he stared at the chunky little man standing on the board sidewalk. "How's that?" He got his breath and added. "Off lead horse? What business is it of yours?"

"None," Bud Nemo said. "Figured you'd like to know. If you're going far you might want that horse pulling his best before you get there. Trouble might be fixed before it gets too bad."

The teamster pulled up and the four horses stomped the mud and breathed heavily. "How come you know more about my horses than I do?"

"I just naturally take to animals, horses special," Nemo said. He clumped out of the mud of the street and ran his hand down between the collar and the shoulder of the horse. The big gelding trembled as he touched the tender spot. He spoke to the horse low. "What's his name?"

"Gin," said the teamster. "Gin and Whisky's the lead team."

"Easy, Gin," Nemo said. "Easy, boy. He moved his hand gently over the sore area. "Trouble could be right here. Feel that bunch in the collar padding? Maybe we can rub it out. Might have to cut it out."

The teamster felt of it. He said, "Yeah. Sure do. No wonder. See what you can do, son."

"Swing 'em over in front of my saddle shop," Nemo said. "Won't take a couple of minutes more."

It didn't take more than ten at the most. He had the teamster on his way with the off lead horse pulling his share and not minding.

Bud Nemo went back in his saddle shop and looked at the old saddle. It needed a new cantle leather covering and the horn was unsteady. The chain harness needed some stitching and one chain needed replacing. He looked at a piece of paper that had been slid under the door before he came. It said:

My best horse is down sick and my range bull got himself bad cut somehow. Sure wish you'd come up first thing in the morning.

It was signed "Ben McGrew." Ben had the Lazy Y spread up Rock Creek.

Bud Nemo put down the note and took off his slicker. He poured water into the basin at the back and sputtered as he washed his face with his hands. He stood before the cracked mirror over the wash basin and combed his wet hair, slicked it down hard and made a flip on the right side. He straightened his neckerchief and thought about Sara Larkin at Joe Yancy's Lunch.

He grinned at himself in the mirror. That was always the nicest part of the day when he went to Joe's lunch for supper and got served by Sara. They'd been kids together, gone to school together at the little adobe school house out beyond the corral. Funny he'd never mentioned marriage to her. But there'd been a reason. And most likely he never would ask her to marry him.

Walking into Joe's Lunch usually gave him a warm feeling. It was about like coming home. Sara made it so. But now the feeling wasn't there. Sara was at the other end serving Hi Freeman and Matt Carson some ham and eggs with home fries and baked beans on the side. She glanced at him and her face went hard and she looked away again and Bud Nemo thought he saw her hand shake as she lifted two heavy white cups of steaming coffee to the counter.

The two men glanced at him and back at their grub as if they knew what was coming and didn't want to get mixed into trouble.

Sara came hurrying toward him, glancing at the door to the street. Her voice was low, tense. "Bud, Rink Bryan's in town. He's gunning for you."

Bud Nemo was fishing something out of his pocket. He put the little animal on the counter and spoke softly. "Sit up for Sara," he said. "Sit up and whistle nice for Sara."

The prairie-dog sat up and washed its face.

"Whistle," Bud said. "What makes you so serious tonight, Sara? Nobody's been bothering you, have they?"

"Bud, listen to me," Sara said and there was pleading in her soft brown eyes. "I tell you Rink Bryan's in town with a tough bunch. He was in a while ago about you. He said he had a score

to settle with you and he touched his guns."

"That's silly," Nemo said. "I don't pack guns. What's he— Hey, who is this Rink Bryan?"

"You know Rink," she said. "You sure remember him. At school. We all went to school together, at the adobe. You had a fight with him once—when we went to school. That was before your foot got shot."

Bud Nemo grinned, then laughed. "Oh, sure," he said. "How is he? Forgot all about him. Hey, that was you we fought over." Bud Nemo's face went dark suddenly as he remembered.

"He's come back," Sara warned. "Be careful, Bud. He's looking for an excuse to get even."

"But that was a long time ago," Nemo said. "It was just a kid fight."

"Was it a kid fight?" she said and she straightened. "Was that it?"

"You know a heap better than that," he said. "Rink had been saying nasty things about your father. And I called him for it and we got fighting and I licked him. But I'd do it again if—"

Sara softened. "I wouldn't want you to, really," she said. "Rink's powerful big now and tough looking and those two men with him—" She glanced at the door. "I saw notches. He's got four notches on his right hand gun, Bud. I'm scared for you."

"But after all this time?" Nemo said. "Why didn't he come back before?"

"He said he would have, but his folks moved to the coast and he got to running out there. Now he's back in this country and he's promised himself he'd even things up."

She stood staring at the prairie dog on the counter. He was washing his face and now he lifted his head and gave a shrill little whistle.

"Give him some beans, will you, Sara? And some of that catsup of 'em? He likes beans and catsup, don't you, Chip?" He rubbed him behind the ears.

"Bud, you're not paying any attention to what I've been telling you."

"Get him some beans and catsup, will you, Sara? And I'll have beef stew. Rink's only trying to show off for you, now that he's come back."

She hesitated, then gave up. She called the order into Joe in the kitchen, then found a little dish of beans and put some catsup on them. Chip put his front paws on the edge of the dish and began eating his supper.

"Stew coming up," Joe called from the kitchen.

She got Bud Nemo his plate of stew and fried potatoes and beans on the side and drew him a cup of coffee.

"Bud, you're driving me crazy." She said, leaning on the counter before him. "I tell you, Rink's looking for you. Haven't you got a sick cow or something you can go look after until he leaves town."

Joe called from the kitchen. "Sara," he said, "you better get your coffee ground for the next potful."

She sighed, looked at Bud. He grinned at her. "He's only bluffin' to sound big, I figure. Don't worry about it so."

She colored. "All right," she said. "Get yourself beat up, or worse." She turned and went into the kitchen.

Hi Freeman bent closer to Matt Carson's best ear and tried to talk loud enough to be heard above the noise the coffee grinder made in the kitchen.

BUD NEMO could hear him plain, too plain. "You're new around Hell's Basin, Matt," Hi was saying. "Likely you never heard about Sara Larkin's old man. Steal anything wasn't spiked fast. Finally got him for horse stealing and cattle rustling all at the same time and they hung him. That was when this girl of his was going to school. Kids talked right nasty to her, some. Her mother died when she was born so when her old man got hung, the riding parson and his wife took her in till she could work and she's worked here for Joe ever since."

Bud Nemo felt his back chilling. He glanced down the counter, at the two men. Matt Carson was craning his neck, looking at Sara working at the big wheel of the coffee grinder in the kitchen. He said, "She sure is concerned about this saddler, Bud Nemo."

"Always kind of hit it off together since they was kids," Hi Freeman said still louder. "But never got to the stage of getting hitched. Might be Bud Nemo changed when he got most of his foot shot off in a shooting accident. He's been kind of sensitive and shy since that. As if he knew he wasn't like other folks. Never packed a gun and got so seems he liked animals better than folks. Always got some little wild beast he's tamed."

Bud Nemo felt his face crimson. He

was trembling in his fork hand. Course, Hi and Matt didn't figure anybody else could hear with the noise in the kitchen. They wouldn't have talked like that if they'd known. Bud Nemo was sure of that. They were good sorts, both of them.

"Nemo's a nephew of Sheriff Tom Cantrell, ain't he?" Matt Carson was saying. And when Bud caught the nod of Hi's head, he heard Matt say, "Must have been a big disappointment to a lightning draw, hell-for-leather fighting man like Sheriff Cantrell to have a nephew turn so all fired peaceful. Kind of a hermit, this Nemo, eh?"

"Cow doctor, kind of," Hi said. "Can do anything with animals, or saddle leather, for that matter. But he sure got all played out for guns when a six-gun the sheriff gave him for his fifteenth birthday went off accidental and shot off half his foot. Ain't touched a gun since. Lives in a cabin out beyond the edge of town. Got a half dozen wild animals for pets. Don't allow nobody to hunt near his place. Says he knows how it feels to get shot at and hit."

Bud Nemo tried to hunch lower over the counter. He hoped Sara couldn't hear what they were saying. Maybe she was keeping the coffee grinder going so long so he wouldn't know it if she heard.

"Shooting his foot must have made him plumb yellow," Matt said.

The coffee grinding stopped and Hi said, "Most folks around Hell's Basin figure it that way." He stopped and turned.

The door of the lunch room opened and heavy boots thundered on the worn boards before the counter.

Bud Nemo sat deep in his misery. He heard Hi speak in a stage whisper to Matt. "Don't move," he said, "we'll see if he's yellow. It's Rink Bryan come back."

Bud Nemo raised his head higher and let his stocky shoulders go back. He turned then and looked at the three men who had just come in.

He recognized Rink Bryan right off. He was in the lead. He was big, all right, towering above the others. He began swaggering to the stool where Bud Nemo sat.

Sara Larkin came hurrying in from the kitchen. She stopped short, caught her breath, stood motionless.

Rink Bryan carried his six-guns slung low on his hips. His hands went to his holsters, the two men behind him did likewise. They stood like guards near the broad-shouldered youngster and waited for Rink to act.

Bud Nemo remained seated on the stool and looked up at big Rink Bryan. He held out his hand. "You're Rink Bryan," he said. "I'd sure know you anywhere, Rink. How—"

Rink Bryan didn't say a word. He held out his hand and his big fingers grasped Nemo's smaller hand. He yanked and let go with his left and even as that left fist came, Bud Nemo remembered that Rink Bryan had been the left-handed kid in school. Rink's fists flailed.

In that surprise move, the world exploded for Nemo. There were crashing sounds and lights flashing about Nemo and then everything turned black. There was no interest left in anything for Bud Nemo.

SHERIFF Tom Cantrell was a big man with a booming voice and a swagger that let any stranger know that he was sure of his ability to enforce the law.

He was talking and his voice made a sound like gravel rattling in the bottom of a barrel. He was talking to Bud Nemo as the young cow-doctor, saddle-maker opened his eyes.

"A nephew of mine," Tom Cantrell was saying. "My own flesh and blood. My sister's kid getting beat like this. I won't be able to face the folks of this county. A coward lying down and getting licked this bad. What in blazes got into you since you grew up, Bud?"

Bud Nemo stared at his uncle. He didn't feel sorry or sad about anything except the pain that he had. His whole face felt like a bulging sack of torture. He put his hand up and felt the bandages.

"Doc says your jaw ain't quite broke but almost," Tom Cantrell roared. "What'd you let him do it for? Sara said she told you he was after you, to get even. Why wasn't you on guard, expecting trouble? What you want to do, get yourself beat to death?"

Nemo tried to talk. He made a croaking sound. He tried to think of something to say. He might say that the attack was unexpected. But that wouldn't make sense. His uncle had mentioned that point already. Why hadn't

he been on guard? He'd been warned. And it wouldn't do any good to say that he couldn't figure a man doing a thing like that, when he'd offered his hand to him.

He looked around the room that he was lying in. It was the sheriff's home. His Aunt El came into the door. "Now Tom," she said, "don't be too hard on the boy. Maybe he's got a good reason for not fighting back or being ready." Then, she waited to hear what Bud had to say in explanation. But of course there wasn't any more to say to Aunt El than there had been to the sheriff.

"You feel like eating?" his aunt asked and there was a touch of disgust in her voice. "Want some soup? I got some beef stew if you want it. Sara said you liked beef stew. You ordered some just before—"

Bud nodded his head slowly and the throbbing started again. "Beef stew'll—be all—right," he managed.

The sheriff left the room and Bud looked outside and saw how dark it had become. He was wondering how late it was, when his aunt came in with a bowl of stew and sat down beside the bed with it.

"Your uncle's sure disgusted about you getting beat up so," she said. She fed him a spoonful of the stew. "And he says first chance you get after your face heals enough, you're going to meet that Rink Bryan and punch him silly."

She fed him a piece of the meat. "Eat hearty. It'll make you strong again. You been spending too much time looking after sick cows and taking care of those crazy pet animals you got at your cabin, anyway. You don't eat enough food. Got to eat to make you strong."

Bud didn't answer. He ate the stew as she fed it to him and then, half through, she said, "You can finish it yourself. I reckon you're not so bad off but you can sit up and eat."

He sat up and finished the bowl. He put the bowl on the floor and started to get up and his aunt came in again. "The doctor said you weren't to get out of bed," she said. "Not until tomorrow morning, if you feel like it then."

He didn't feel like it in the morning, but he got up anyway. There was that sick horse at the Lazy Y outfit and the range bull all cut up. And there were his animals at the cabin to take care of and a lot of things. He wondered what had happened to Chip, the prairie-dog he'd had eating on the counter when Rink Bryan had come in. Likely Sara had taken him to his cabin and put him with the other animals.

Sheriff Cantrell talked to him during breakfast. He said things like, "You're going to lick that no good Bryan boy, you hear, Bud? I wouldn't face the folks of this county with my head up if my own nephew takes that beating and does nothing about it."

Bud finished his breakfast hurriedly and rose to leave. Tom Cantrell caught his arm. "I'm talking to you, you hear?" he said. "Not today, you don't lick him because your face's too bad beat up. But maybe tomorrow or—" The big man snorted. "Blast a man like you for a nephew. Don't even know how to handle a gun." He gave him a final look, then turned to his fried eggs and shoveled them into his big mouth. He waved his fork at Bud Nemo. "Go on," he said. "Get out of my sight for a while. Don't bother me for the rest of the day. I don't want to set eyes on you until you make more of a man of yourself."

That was all right with Bud Nemo. He found his buckskin in his uncle's corral and saddled and rode down toward town. There just outside the town, his cabin lay nestled against the wall of Thunder Canyon.

He began calling softly as he rode into the ranch yard. He called "Chick, chick," and a pair of prairie chickens came flapping at him from the little barn. He got down and fed them from a tied sack in the barn and he stroked their heads gently.

He petted the buckskin and turned him loose in the little corral. Then he turned toward the house calling, "Hey, Porky, hey, Pete, hey, Clara."

A wild scream made the cabin shudder as he opened the door. A half grown mountain lion, straining at the collar around his neck and the chain that fastened him to the leg of the corner bunk, made passes at Bud Nemo with giant paws.

A queer procession came from back of the old wood stove. Porky, the porcupine came waddling with his fat belly of quills clattering on the rough board floor. Clara, the skunk, arched her white striped back and stretched from her long sleep.

He petted them all and fed them. "I

got to go see a sick horse and a hurt bull," he said. "I'll leave you all outside while I'm gone." Then he unfastened the half foot square swinging door set in the bottom log of the cabin so that Porky and Clara could run back in the house if there was danger. He took Pete out on his chain and fastened him to the alligator juniper tree at the end of the cabin. "You," he said, "can take care of the place and yourself, Pete. Don't let anybody go inside."

Pete began purring with a roaring sound, and rubbed his head hard enough against Bud Nemo's arm to push him over.

It had always been that way with Bud Nemo and animals. Once he'd said to Sara when she'd asked, "I guess it's because I trust animals more than humans. Did you ever hear of an animal double-crossing you?"

When he got to the Lazy Y there wasn't as much to do as he had expected. The horse was a little better and Bud told Ben McGrew what to do for him beside giving him doses of sulphur. He got the range bull patched after petting and bribing him and working slow and easy. Ben McGrew watched, and shook his head in disbelief.

"I sure don't figure how you do it," he said. "If I was to try that on that bull, without throwing him first, he'd have me mashed into the ground like a stepped on potato."

Bud did not reply. Somehow he found himself thinking about his own problems now that his face was feeling better and he would be heading back for town.

"That sure was a awful beating Rink gave you," Ben McGrew said.

"Yeah," Nemo agreed. "Guess I got to do something about it, too. Reckon my sheriff uncle'll disown me if I don't go back and lick him before he leaves town."

"He'll kill you," Ben McGrew said, shuddering a little. "I happened in town last night. Rink sure was talking big. Him and them two with him. Don't like the looks of them three. There's going to be trouble."

"Won't be anything that sheriff uncle of mine can't take care of," Bud Nemo said.

AS HE mounted his buckskin and headed back for town, his mind began worrying at all the possible things he could do about Rink Bryan. Perhaps he could figure out a way to catch Bryan off guard and lick him in a hurry. Confusion and fear roiled within him as he rode, and as he neared his cabin in the late afternoon, the thought came to him that maybe he ought to clear out of this country altogether. But instantly he fought the dangerous impulse.

There was too much to do here. Sick stock around the country he'd promised to come see. That sheep dog of Manuel Sanchez up in the north mesa country. He'd broken his leg and Bud Nemo was trying a new splint idea, trying to save the dog. He figured it should work. He wanted to stay and see.

And then there was Sara Larkin. He didn't mind much what his uncle and aunt said about him. They were always scrapping about his relative worthlessness. They'd been like that ever since he'd come to live with them when he was real little, almost before he could remember. He was used to that. But somehow, he couldn't run out on Sara Larkin. He'd never said anythnig to Sara, but he knew there was a bond between them ever since he'd licked Rink Bryan the year before they finished school when Rink had made her cry. He'd called her a horse thief's daughter or something like that. And Bud had rubbed Rink's face in the dirt until he'd apologized to Sara Larkin for what he'd said.

He turned back toward his cabin and started to dismount. Pete screamed at him from the end of the chain at the tree. The prairie chicks came for him out of the barn and magpies followed to get the feed that the chicks didn't eat.

Something seemed to be going on in town. He could hear the yelling and a scream and then some wild shots. He listened for a moment and then dismissed the sounds as having no meaning. Rink Bryan had been going wild last night, Ben McGrew said, and likely he was starting to raise hell a little early this evening. Likely he and the two with him had been tanked up all day on Hell's Basin's forty-rod whisky and they were getting wild for the dark.

He could hear horses riding hard and another scream and some more yelling. Things were getting serious. The sound of shooting died, the yelling increased and the thud of horses hooves seemed to be coming nearer. Sounds of shooting seemed closer now. Then all the noise

seemed to turn up the trail toward the rimrock along the canyon wall high above.

Bud Nemo packed away his bandages and liniments and medicines and let Porky and Clara out of the house and rubbed Pete behind the ears, all the while wondering with increased tenseness what was coming next.

The furious clatter of a buckboard coming toward the cabin brought Nemo up sharp. Hi Freeman was driving and Sara Larkin perched on the tail of the rig. A man was lying on the buckboard floor, his feet shoved under the opening below the seat and his head in the lap of the girl. Sara called out as Hi swung into the yard.

"It's your uncle," she said tersely. "He was shot chasing them and we brought him here to your cabin as the nearest place. He's shot bad."

Bud limped over and his uncle looked up with pain in his eyes. "Let's get him in my bunk and call the doctor," Bud said.

"The doctor's on a call up Angel Valley," Sara said.

They carried Sheriff Cantrell in and laid him gently in the bunk. Bud lay out his bandages and medicines, the same as he used for horses and cows. He began working on the wounds, one near the lungs, another through the shoulder.

Clara, the skunk, climbed up on the commode, her favorite place, and curled up and watched.

"Get that blasted skunk out of here," Hi Freeman said.

"Better not touch him. He don't like strangers," Nemo warned. "He might go off if you was to touch him."

"You mean," Hi Freeman said incredulously, "that skunk has the run of the house and he ain't fixed so he can't stink it up?"

"He's all right with me," Nemo said. "I was hoping Chip, my pet prairie dog would be here when I came this morning," he said, looking at Sara.

Her face paled. "I'm sorry, Bud," she said.

"Sorry?" He looked up from his attentions. "What you sorry about?"

"Well, you see," Sara began, "the prairie dog—I mean after Rink Bryan knocked you unconscious, he—"

"You mean he—he did something to Chip?"

She nodded and turned her eyes away.

"He killed him," Hi Freeman snapped. "How's your uncle coming? We got to get him around so he can direct the posse chasing Rink and the other two he brought to rob the bank."

Bud looked intently at Hi Freeman. "Wait a minute. What you trying to tell me, Freeman?"

"I'm not trying to tell you nothing," Freeman said. "I'm asking how your uncle will be. Will he come around pretty soon?"

"I guess so," Bud said. "But about Rink? You say he came to rob the bank?"

"Sure. That's what he come for. And took the chance to beat you up while he was here. Now half a dozen of the boys from the Empire saloon are after them. He got your uncle and shot Deputy Wheeler straight through the head. He didn't have a chance. Never saw a man so fast or accurate with a pair of six-guns as that Rink Bryan. Must have been him and the other two been robbing banks over west of here. We been getting news about it now and then."

The sheriff, under Bud's ministrations, was evidently feeling much better, for he tried to sit up. "How am I, Bud?" he asked.

"Fine," Bud said. "You'll be okay."

"I got to get after that Rink Bryan. Now we both owe him something, Bud. Fastest man with a pair of guns, and the best shot from horseback. Got to catch him and put him where he won't do more damage. Dangerous man to be running around."

"Take it easy." There was a queer set to Bud's mouth, as though it had suddenly turned to gray granite. "I got the blood stopped and as soon as Doc gets here he'll fix you permanent."

There was a flurry of hoof beats out in the yard and soon someone came running into the cabin. "Where's—how's the sheriff?" the man asked.

"In here in my bunk," Bud said. "But be quiet."

MATT CARSON came in, mud spattered and sweating like a horse. "We got the three of them treed," he panted. "Got 'em holed up above here in the old Hollister adobe place on the rim of the canyon."

"Great balls of fire," Sheriff Cantrell said. He tried to raise himself but Bud held him down. "He can hole up in there

for as long as his ammunition holds out. And likely he can get out and down the face of the rimrock, someplace, and escape after dark."

"That's what we figured, too," Matt Carson said. "That's why I come to ask you what to do."

"Don't get excited," Bud said to his uncle. "You do and you'll start bleeding again." Bud turned to Sara Larkin. "How did Rink kill Chip?"

She shuddered and Hi Freeman said, "He took and—"

"Never mind," Bud said. "That's enough." He looked back at his uncle and Sheriff Tom Cantrell was looking up at him.

"Blast it, Bud," Sheriff Cantrell barked. "Why couldn't you have been a fighting man so I could turn things like this over to you?"

Bud stood very still looking down at his uncle. He said, "I believe I got a way to make them come out of the adobe if that's what you want."

Sheriff Cantrell glared at him. "You're crazy," he said.

"Don't get yourself excited over it," Bud warned. "Only I'm pretty sure I can get Rink out if you give me a chance to try."

The sheriff raised himself on an elbow. "You and your crazy ideas," he shouted. "I wouldn't—"

Bud reached over on the commode and got the half sleeping Clara and put her on his shoulder. He didn't look at his uncle again, but headed for the door, picking up Porky, the porcupine on the way.

"Matt, Hi," he heard his uncle bellow, "you two go see he don't get things mucked up for the posse. They're having enough trouble as it is."

He heard the two men coming after him but they didn't follow him clear to where Pete was chained to the tree. Bud didn't pay them any mind. He unchained Pete. The wildcat snarled past him at the men.

"Yep, you're getting too old to manage, Pete," Bud said. "Reckon you better take on out when you get the chance. And I believe that's going to be real soon."

"Bud," Hi Freeman said, "what you aiming to do with those wild animals?"

"Just like I said," Bud explained. "I'll get Rink and the others out of the adobe cabin if they want him out." He started up the winding trail that led, first toward town and then switched back to the mesa atop the canyon wall.

Ed Latham, a new deputy sheriff, and some of the boys, met Bud near a clump of mesquite at the top. It was dark and Ed didn't know for sure what was coming until the wildcat spit right in his face. He jumped back, cursing.

"What the devil's going on?" he flared out.

Hi Freeman answered from a respectful distance behind Bud. "Bud Nemo figures he's got a way to get Rink Bryan and his gang out of the cabin."

"Out of that pint-sized fortress?" Ed Latham barked. He threw back his head and laughed. "A cannon couldn't blast them out from behind them three foot adobe walls."

"Well," Matt Carson said, "now maybe he might have something, if it's what I'm beginning to guess it is. I'll go along with him."

"You gone crazy, too?" Hi Freeman demanded.

"If I can help you, Bud," Matt said, "I'll be glad to."

"All I want," Bud said, "is to keep Rink and his men interested in something besides me. I'm going to climb that cypress and try to get over on the roof. Then if you'd have some greasewood gathered to build a fire, so you could see when they come out."

"When they come out!" Latham said, and laughed again.

Bud didn't wait to hear any more. He started off in the darkness, keeping low in the brush, heading for the cypress near the cabin.

Matt Carson came out behind him in the brush. He ran over a clear place, ducked and started yelling for Rink to come out or they'd come in and get him. Rink hollered back to come ahead. Then some of the others started yelling.

Bud reached the tree, crouched, waited. He heard the shouts coming from the other end of the cabin and he started up the tree. Pete, the wildcat, leaped up ahead of him. The skunk and the porcupine clung to him. He worked his way to the roof ridge and then to the chimney opening.

"Now cut a hole in the roof," one of the posse yelled, "and jump in barehanded and take 'em all prisoners." Others of the posse laughed their heads off out in the brush.

Bud moved along toward the chimney, his three animals at his side. He kept saying, "I hope the flue opening is big enough. I sure hope so."

He stopped at the chimney opening and looked down into a large, rectangular, black hole. There was no light inside. He held the porcupine over the chimney hole, lowered his arm to break the short fall for Porky.

"Get off that roof or I'll blast you off," a voice from below yelled. A second later his gun exploded twice.

Matt Carson laughed off in the brush.

"That's a sod roof," he said. "You couldn't move it short of dynamite."

Bud warmed a little with Matt rooting for him. He lowered Porky deeper into the chimney flu and released him quickly.

Quickly, he turned, grabbed the wildcat, slipped his collar and lowered Pete into the chimney. It would add to the excitement if a quill or two of Porky's put Pete into motion.

The wildcat scratched and dug.

Quickly, Bud let go of Pete and reached for Clara. There was a scream and a terrible row at the bottom of the chimney. Pete had landed and was taking command with plenty of noise. In the middle of all that, Bud held Clara into the flue opening. She was already excited from the commotion below and was trying to get her tail up.

He let her go and turned away swiftly.

All fury broke loose below. Inside the adobe cabin men yelled and the wildcat screamed and spat and through it all Clara, the Skunk, did her stuff nobly so that it permeated into every nostril and eye.

The fire outside flared and in a matter of minutes a blocky outlaw came plunging out, clawing at his eyes. Next came the other man and then they could hear Rink Bryan yelling, "I'm coming and anybody gets in my way, dies."

Bud Nemo was sliding down the roof, his crippled foot acting as a steering guide. He came shooting down at top speed and plunged, arms out, straight for Rink Bryan who was just coming through the doorway with a gun in his hand.

There was a resounding crash on the ground and then, fists were flying and Rink Bryan's head snapped back. He dropped his gun and Bud Nemo struck him hard again and again, mercilessly and without quarter.

Then Nemo rose up, limping on his bad foot. He half yanked Rink Bryan to his feet, and while Rink attempted to land a blow, Nemo ducked under and let drive with a ramrod right.

FOR A moment Rink Bryan tottered there like a great statue wavering on its pedestal. Then his knees sagged and he collapsed.

Bud Nemo stood panting and looking down at the big unconscious giant. Someone caught at his arm and a voice said, "I'm so proud of you, Bud."

Sara Larkin was beside him. "How—did you get—here?" he said, bewildered and shaken.

"The doctor came and said your uncle will be fine in a short time and your uncle sent me to tell you to be careful. He said if Rink Bryan could beat him up like he did you'd better not tackle him." She laughed suddenly and her voice made a happy little tinkling sound. "Wait till he finds out."

Bud Nemo grinned. "You really meant what you said—about being proud of me?"

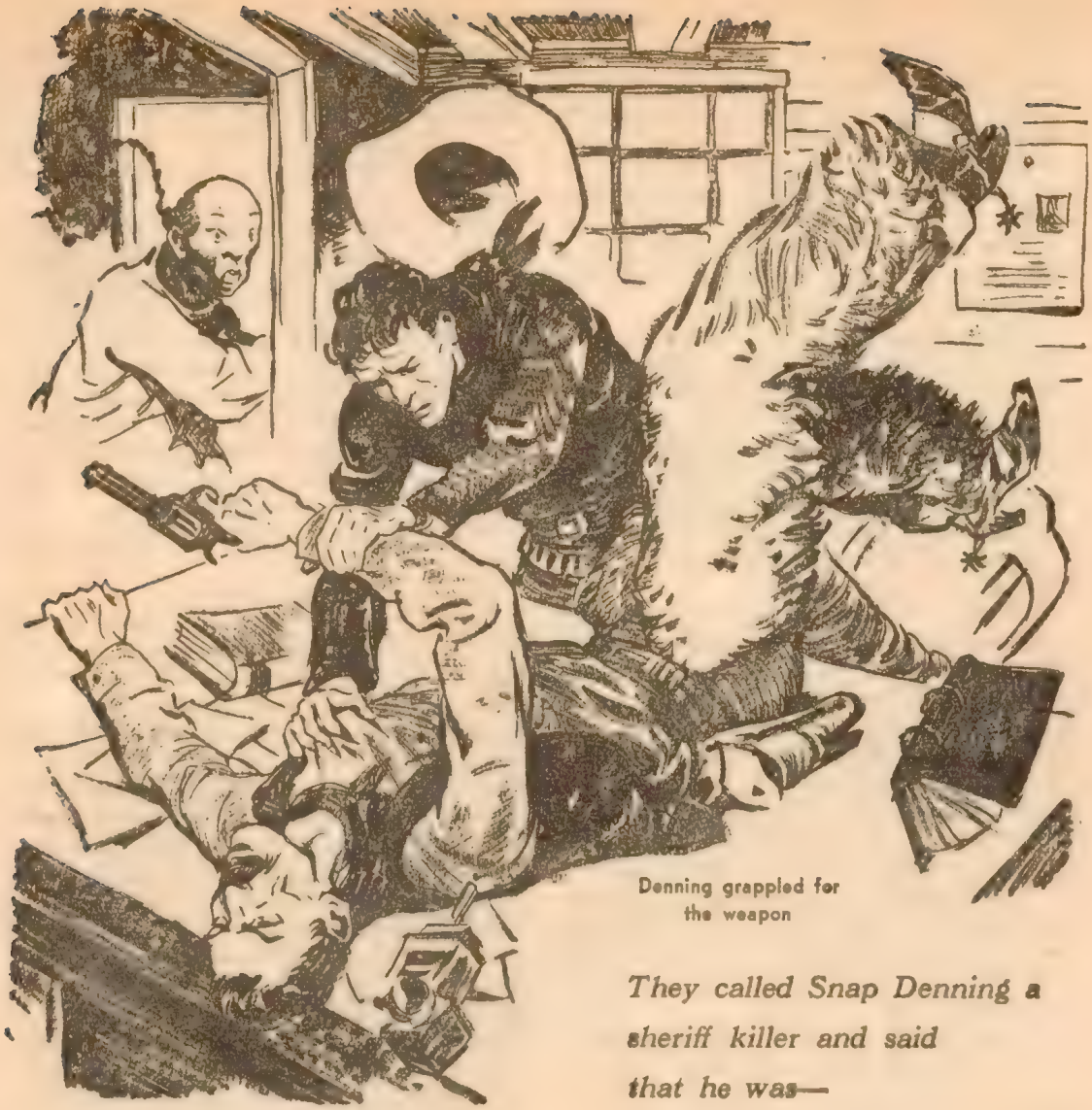
"Of course," she said. "I've always been proud of you."

"You mean—with my crippled foot and all?"

"Certainly," she said. "What's that got to do with us?"

"Nothing, I guess," Nemo said, a little tremulously. "Remind me to ask you something—when I get my breath—will you, Sara?"

But he didn't need to wait. He could see the answer in the light that shone in her eyes.



Denning grappled for the weapon

They called Snap Denning a sheriff killer and said that he was—

BORN TO HANG

By TOM PARSONS

THERE were four in the poker game which had been going on for hours in the back room of the Big Horn Saloon. Four—well, they could hardly be called friends, though they knew each other well.

Between grizzled Sheriff Rogers, political boss of Cactus County and his nephew, Rick Foster, existed only the grudging loyalty of kinship, no real liking. Foster owned the Big Horn Saloon, he was loud, coarse, flashy and considered more than average greedy for the elusive dollar. Rogers was quiet, soft-spoken, but rated the most influential man in that section of Arizona.

As lubricant, or it might be irritant, between these two was Tony Mendoza, a debonair young Mexican reputed lightning fast with a six-gun and a dead

shot at any distance, who was Foster's shadow. Mendoza was the sort who enjoyed being the power behind the throne, who relished the game of stirring Foster's slower wits with his nimble mind and watching the big man react to his suggestions.

The fourth man of this odd quartet was Snap Denning, cowhand, chuck-line rider and general fiddle-foot.

"Born to hang," the citizens of nearby Cochise County had described him, as they requested him to leave and not come back.

And Sheriff Rogers had made no disguise of his dislike of Denning when that blithe young cowhand had invited himself into the game.

"I don't like sheriff killers," the veteran rumbled pointedly.

Denning was unruffled. "Masters was a killer and a thief," he said, shuffling the cards. "His specialty was robbing stages and shooting men in the back. He grabbed that sheriff's badge the way he grabbed everything else, and you know it, Rogers. Fact, the folks of Cochise County thanked me for settling his hash just before they asked me to leave. Had to keep up appearances, you know."

"All the same, Masters was representing the law," Rogers growled. "And if Cochise County asked for it I'd slap you into the *calabozo* so fast it'd make your head swim."

"I am plumb honored by your attention," Denning said mockingly.

WITH an exclamation of impatience Mendoza interrupted the conversation.

"Senores," he said. "The game is getting cold. Shall we take Senor Denning's monee from heem or no?"

"What makes you think he's got any?" the saloon keeper grumbled, watching the cards flick from Denning's fingers.

"A good question," Denning said. "How can anybody in this town have any money with Rick Foster around?"

"Meaning?" Foster demanded nastily.

"Meaning you're plumb slick with the pasteboards, pard," Denning said mockingly. "And to your friendship with Lady Luck."

"The Senor Denning has read a book," Mendoza purred, studying his cards.

"Read several," Denning told him. "Got fired off one job for it too. Boss figured a cowhand should work with his fingers, not his brains and didn't trust a man who could read."

"Gab, gab, gab," Sheriff Rogers said testily. "I thought you wanted to play!"

He might have regretted that remark some time later, for the elusive Lady Luck, of whom Denning had spoken so lightly, turned her face sternly away from him. Gold pieces and bills drifted across the table, some to Denning and Mendoza, but most to his nephew, Rick Foster. And though no one mentioned it, Denning found himself mildly surprised at the quantity of money which came out of the sheriff's pockets.

Foster's Chinese waiter brought in a tray of drinks.

"Hi, Lee," Denning said.

"'Lo, Mistlah Snap," Lee said, grinning broadly. The waiter was, curiously enough, an ardent admirer of Denning's, probably because the cowboy was the only one who treated him like a human being instead of a curiosity.

As Lee set down a glass at his side, Denning felt a slight pressure from the Oriental's elbow. He watched from under partially lowered eyelids as Lee rounded the table to Foster's side. Knowing the cowboy was watching him, Lee allowed his glance to slide down and rest on Foster's flying fingers as the saloon man dealt. Then one Oriental eyelid came down in a meaingful wink.

Alerted, Denning focused on the dealer's hands and saw what he should have seen earlier. Foster was dealing "seconds," giving Sheriff Rogers and Denning the second card from the top instead of the top card, while the top card went to Mendoza and himself.

Denning waited until the deal came around to him again, then as Foster flipped him a card, he pushed it back with a forefinger.

"Don't want it," he announced. "I'll take the top one, Rick."

Every man at the table froze. The blood drained from Rick Foster's face, leaving it white and strained and ugly.

"You know what you're saying?" he whispered, his hands tense on the table top.

"I know what I'm saying," Denning retorted harshly. "You're givin' me and the sheriff seconds and dealin' off the top for Mendoza and you!"

Decision flowered in the saloon man's

eyes, but Rogers beat him to the action. He was up on his feet, cards spilling, heavy hand jerking his Peacemaker Colt from holster.

"That'll be enough of that!" he roared. "Denning, you're a blasted trouble-maker and you're itchin' to kill someone. By grab, you'll get the whippin' you deserve!" And, raging, he slashed at the cowboy's head with his gun barrel.

Denning ducked the blow and closed with the sheriff. They reeled across the room and came up against Foster's big desk on the opposite side. Grappling for the weapon, Denning bent the sheriff back across the desk. Rogers was a big man and powerful and Denning had his hands full.

In the flurry of thrashing arms and legs and the strain of trying to hold the gun away from him, Denning never knew just what happened. There was the stunning roar of an explosion, the blast of burning powder smoke and the acrid cloud that choked and blinded him. Then Foster and Mendoza fell on his back like angry cougars and almost at the same moment the crowd poured in from the outside saloon.

THEY held him and took his gun while Foster made a quick examination of the sheriff, who was still sprawled across the desk with a widening red stain slowly growing on his shirt.

"He's dead," Foster reported. The crowd slowly removed their sombreros.

"Who killed him?" demanded a voice.

Mendoza stepped to the fore, leveling a finger at Denning.

"I saw eet," he announced. "The sheriff caught this *malo* one cheating and called him. The sheriff drew his gun to arrest heem and this one, with the strength of *el diablo* himself wrested the gun from the sheriff and shot him. Look in the sheriff's hand!"

The gun in the limp hand lying on the desk had unquestionably been fired.

"That's a pack of lies!" Denning said angrily. "It was Foster who was cheating and it was me who called him! And—"

"Senor," said Mendoza sadly, "deed you fight weeth the sheriff or did Senor Foster?"

"Well I—"

"He admeets it, see? And if Senor Foster was cheating, why would the sheriff fight weeth you?"

"Because—" Denning stopped, realizing how neatly he was trapped.

"Hang him!" growled someone in the crowd. "He's a sheriff killer—born to be hanged!"

"Wait a minute!" Foster assumed command. "We'll do this legal. Without the sheriff we'll organize a kangaroo court and give this man a fair trial before we hang him!"

"Es verdad," Mendoza said, smiling. "We are going to hang him, but we must do it legally."

A few moments later, Denning, his hands tied behind him, was a prisoner in the store-room back of the saloon, while Mendoza, seated in a chair tilted back against the wall, guarded him. From outside came the faint mutter of voices as the crowd chose a jury and organized a quick justice court.

Denning surveyed a future which looked most unpromising. In half an hour or so he would be the principal actor in a short drama whose only prop would be a length of rope. And that would be an end to him and his dreams and plans and hopes.

"You know," he said, "dying ain't so bad. We all do it sooner or later. But what sure galls me is dying for the profit of Foster and Mendoza."

The Mexican shrugged. "Thees no doubt is what my *madre* called Fate and it is only a veree stupid man who argues weeth fate."

Denning turned his back on him and stared out the storeroom window at the darkening sky. Night was creeping up from the valley and only the distant mountaintops were alight. The shadows were already thick amongst the frame buildings of the town.

There seemed to be another shadow there which moved. Eyes narrow, Snap Denning saw it grow into the form of Lee, the Chinese waiter. Standing as he was, his big body blocked out the window entirely from Mendoza's view and under this protection, Denning watched Lee's cautious approach. The Chinese carried a six-gun in his hand!

Deliberately, Denning turned his back against the window, facing Mendoza again. His bound hands rested on the sill and he could feel the faint current of air coming through where it was open an inch or two. Gently, imperceptibly, he eased it upwards a bit more.

Mendoza watched him lazily. The

Mexican knew the doomed man was planning feverishly some method of escape, but it bothered him not at all. He knew he could draw and put five bullets into Denning before the bound man could get his hampered body into motion.

What he didn't know about was the wild thrill that right then was chasing up Snap Denning's body as he felt the cold steel of a gun sliding into his fingers. He got a good grip on it with his bound hands and waited.

Mendoza stretched, yawned and let his chair down with a thump.

"Getting dark in here," he said. "I do not trust you in thee dark, *amigo*. You are dangerous hombre."

A CANDLE, stuck in its own wax, projected from the top of a barrel where it had furnished light before to those using the store room. Mendoza scratched a match and bent over it, setting the wick afire.

When he straightened up, his eyes momentarily dazzled from looking into the candle flame, he froze. Denning was standing with his body turned awkwardly sideways to him. And jutting from the hands still bound behind his back, was the menacing snout of a pistol!

"Move back," Denning said softly. "It's plumb uncomfortable, but I'm bettin' I can hit you at this range. Want to try?"

For a moment Mendoza was stunned with surprise. Then, he considered the gun, eyes slitted like a panther's. Then he spread his hands and smiled.

"I can wait," he said. "With bound hands, you steel cannot do veree much."

"Unbuckle your belt," Denning ordered, "and let it fall. Move your hands slow and don't get near your guns."

Mendoza let his gunbelt fall at his feet.

"Now kick it over here."

The Mexican obeyed. Satisfied that he had disarmed him as much as possible, Denning backed toward the barrel. Still gripping the gun awkwardly, he set his wrists over the candle flame. He smelled the burning rope, then a sharp pain lanced through his wrists as the flame touched him and involuntarily he jerked and nearly went off balance. Like a cat, Mendoza dived for his gun.

Denning swiveled, pointed his gun at the Mexican as best he could and thumbed the hammer. The report was thunderous in that confined space. Denning did not wait to see the result of the shot. He lunged at the window and went through it in a shower of glass and broken frame.

He landed with a crash, lost the gun and some skin, rolled and staggered to his feet. A horse stamped in the shadows. With a blessing for Lee on his lips, he dashed toward it, but stopped to strain against his bonds, realizing the impossibility of getting into the saddle with his hands tied. The ropes held.

Swearing, Denning came up on the horse's left side. The animal snorted nervously. He spoke soothingly, tried to work his left foot into the stirrup. The animal stepped away from him and he hopped after it on one leg like an awkward stork. Sweat beaded his forehead.

From the saloon in back came the sudden outburst of voices and Mendoza's clear tones rising over all. He had missed, after all, Denning thought, wryly.

He got his toe in the stirrup at last. Without hands it was a wild gamble, but with a heave of his big body, he flung his right leg over and half fell into the saddle.

"Get going, horse," he muttered, nudging the animal.

With reins trailing, the horse was bewildered. He moved at last, holding his head sideways to escape the dragging reins, and at no more than a nervous, hopping walk. And he moved around the corner right into the arms of the kangaroo court which was just then pouring from the saloon.

Denning was dragged from the saddle and hustled into the saloon. Foster was there and Mendoza, untouched and grinning slyly.

"Let's get this over with," Foster said angrily. "This man's dangerous. Anybody got any reason why this court shouldn't pronounce him guilty and hang him pronto?"

"We got to wait for the coroner's verdict," objected a legal-minded member of the jury.

"Which same is comin' now," said another.

The coroner, who was also the undertaker and the owner of the general store, elbowed his way through the crowd.

"What's your verdict?" Foster demanded.

Without a word, the coroner took a jackknife from his pocket and slashed Denning's ropes.

The cowboy flexed his cramped wrists gratefully.

"What's the big idea?" Foster demanded angrily.

WITHOUT replying, the coroner peered into the crowd. "Lee?" he inquired. "Is he out there?"

"Here." The waiter came through. He was frightened, but determined.

"We got an eye-witness to the shooting," the coroner said. "Lee, tell this court what you saw."

"I see him—" Lee pointed at Mendoza "—shoot sheriff and put gun in sheriff's hand."

Uproar broke out.

"Who'd believe him?" Foster bellowed. "You goin' to take his word against mine?"

"We don't have to," the coronor said. "We got another witness."

"Who?"

"Your uncle. You was in such a hurry to pronounce him dead that you didn't make sure. He's down there very much alive, under the care of Doc Barker and he *saw who shot him.* He says Mendoza too, and we all know who Mendoza takes his orders from! Grab them, men!"

Afterwards, when order had been restored and Denning had been stimulated with a few of the drinks which everyone was trying to buy him, the coroner voiced a question.

"What I can't figure out is why Foster wanted to kill his uncle. What was in it for him?"

"That's easy," Denning said. "Most folks don't realize how profitable a sheriff's job is in a rich county like this. In fines and his share of tax collections Sheriff Rogers took in forty thousand a year easy. Didn't yuh know that? And Foster thought he could just as well have that if he could get himself or Mendoza appointed in his uncle's place!"

The coroner whistled. "I want to know!" he said. "I'm runnin' for sheriff, boys," he announced.

"Remember what happened to the last one," he was warned. "Better let Denning have the job. After getting as close as he was to hangin' tonight, nothing ought to scare him any more!"

New Citizens!

IT is interesting to note that the animal which played so great a role in the history of the West was not really native to the North American continent at all. We're speaking of the horse, of course, whose advent in this land dates back to 1519 and the coming of the Spanish conquistadores to Mexico.

Archaeologists tell us that America had a prehistoric native horse which became extinct with the Ice Age. No horse was then seen on this continent until the Spaniards invaded Mexico, and spread northward into what is Texas today. As the herds expanded, and since there were few if any markets for horses in these early days, many escaped to run wild and become prevalent wherever grass grew in the West. Even the "Indian ponies" sprang from this original European ancestry—*Cole Weymouth.*

a Navajo Raine novelet

RIDE THE GHOST DOWN,

When land-looters scheme
to make a clean sweep of the
Horse Canyon Country, six-guns flame scarlet!

CHAPTER I

Death At Dawn!

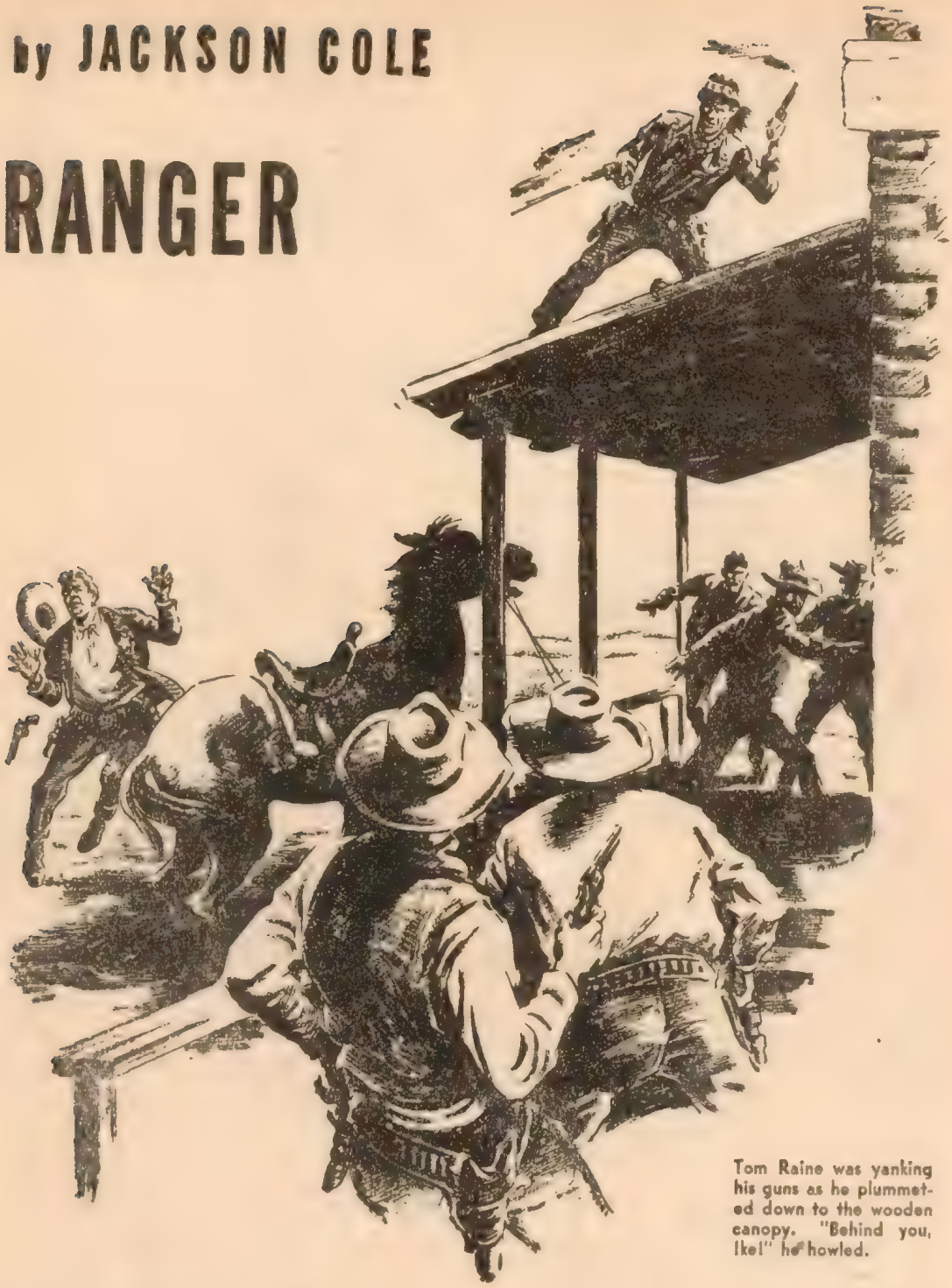
DAWN was touching the eastern horizon with faint gray banners when the six riders came. They were behind the farm home of Ben and Della Ashlock so suddenly "Navajo Tom" Raine, Arizona Territorial Ranger, wondered if his mind could be playing tricks on him.

He leaped up from where he had been sitting, sprinted to his magnificent blue roan horse, Wampum. He was in the saddle at a bound, heading down Horse Canyon toward the Ashlock farm when the dawn's quiet was shattered by the high yowls of men, and the roar of guns!

Raine swung his racing mount hard to

by JACKSON COLE

RANGER



Tom Raine was yanking his guns as he plummeted down to the wooden canopy. "Behind you, Ike!" he howled.

a break in the timber, and Wampum hesitated, crouched as if he meant to stop.

"Come on!" the Ranger croaked, and touched harder with the spurs.

Wampum shot forward in a powerful leap, snorting uneasily as he spurned the earth—and leaped off a tall bank! The Ranger groaned, for Wampum struck Candy Creek with a roaring splash, and plummeted down until Raine felt icy waves slap his own throat.

Wampum came up with a roar of breaking water. Raine gulped air, felt to make sure that his twin pistols were still in their holsters, then swung Wampum down the stream's current for the

ford, the only place where the steep banks sloped enough to allow stock to cross.

Raine was shaking from something besides the cold bath when Wampum's hoofs touched bottom. He could hear guns popping off across the canyon, but a pinkish tinge coming up into the murky dawn told him that he would be late—much too late to help Ben and Della Ashlock.

"Come on, feller!" he called hoarsely. "Get me over there before that killers' bunch can scatter!"

Raine saw a rifle open up from the ridge top behind the flaming farmstead, when he was still two hundred yards away. But the six men who had attacked the farm had suddenly panicked, were flitting like huge, evil bats through the light of the leaping flames. Two swung up the valley, two more fled south, and two came straight toward the Ranger! One bulked big in the saddle, the other was smaller.

RAINE checked his running horse, and dived out of saddle. The two raiders were almost upon him, and his voice rang out in a roaring shout, ordering them to halt. He got the reply he expected—a hoarse yell of alarm from the two murderous raiders, followed promptly by whistling slugs.

The Ranger's teeth bared, and his own guns were suddenly bucking against his palms.

"Tally one!" he whooped, when the bigger raider became a tumbling black shadow that flung out of the saddle.

Raine sent the last two slugs in each weapon after the scrawny raider, who was headed for the timber. He heard a high, thin yell, yet the raider was still in the saddle when his running mount crashed into the thickets along Candy Creek.

Raine jammed fresh loads into his guns, ran out to the man lying sprawled on the grass. He held a cocked six-shooter in his right hand, reached out his left hand, and laid it over the fallen raider's heart.

"You won't help kill anybody else, mister!" he muttered coldly.

Raine ran back to his horse, and sprang into saddle. He went on across the meadow toward the towering flames which were consuming all young Ben Ashlock and his pretty little wife possessed. He saw the white picket fence that had enclosed their yard, eyes frantically searching as he reined his horse to a skidding stop.

Raine groaned then, as he slid out of saddle, his long legs shaking as he hung his flat-crowned black Stetson over the saddle horn. He opened the gate and went to the two huddled figures in the yard.

"Ben!" he called, and the flames seemed to roar in ghoulish mockery.

Raine had started to kneel down beside the couple when a spur tinkled behind him, and he heard a gun being cocked.

"You, Injun!" a cold voice lashed out. "Don't move, or I shoot. Yuh savvy, Injun?"

Navajo Tom Raine was like an image carved from stone as that hard-voiced man called him an Indian. And there was nothing so surprising in that, for there in the red light of the roaring fire, Raine certainly looked like a stalwart young Indian.

The Ranger's hawkish features were burned to a mahogany color by the sun, and he wore his thick black hair Navajo Indian style—cropped just enough to keep the ends from brushing the tops of his big shoulders. His heavy gold and silver Spanish spurs were set with turquoise, the grips of the two matched .45s at his muscular thighs were set with the same and the black Stetson that hung over the horn of his saddle had a band of silver ornaments, each studded with a flawless turquoise.

"So yuh're one of the raiders who help evil spirit of old Sam Parrish kill all the farmers in this valley, eh, Injun?" the voice asked mockingly.

The one thing about Navajo Tom Raine that would quickly dispel the illusion that he was an Indian was the color of his eyes. Those eyes were bright green, and suddenly they had fury in their chill depths as he caught the taunting note in the unseen man's voice.

"I'm not an Indian, I'm not one of the sneakin' cowards who killed the Ashlocks and fired this place, and I'm not stupid enough to believe that the ghost of Sam Parrish leads the raiders who have been rampagin' in Hoss Canyon," Raine said coldly.

"Yuh don't sound like an Indian, at that!" the man behind the Ranger grunted.

Raine remembered the rifleman who had scattered those raiders, and wondered if this man could have been using that long gun.

"I'm Tom Raine, Arizona Territorial Ranger," Raine said evenly.

Raine turned casually, saw the man standing inside the gate, six-shooter leveled.

"Oh, it's you, Parrish," Raine forced his voice to sound calm.

The man was Glen Parrish, of the Star Ranch, by far the largest spread in this section. He was a strapping, muscular man in his early thirties. An expensive Stetson was shoved back on sleek, black hair, and he was watching Navajo Raine out of eyes that were as chill as steel.

"You've credentials, I presume?" Parrish asked.

THE RANGER nodded his head to indicate that he had such credentials, aware that Glen Parrish had dropped the range vernacular.

"I reckon I can't blame yuh for bein' a little cagey, Parrish, seeing that this is the fourth farm those cowardly raiders have struck here on your Star range within the past six months!" the Ranger declared.

"So?" Glen Parrish drawled, and Raine definitely did not like the man's arrogance.

Raine stepped forward with the leather case he had pulled from his hip pocket.

"This case is soaked," Parrish said sharply. "Your clothing looks wet, and I heard water in your boots when you moved."

"I got a duckin' in Candy Creek." Raine shrugged. "But the papers in that folder are wrapped in oiled silk, so yuh'll have no trouble makin' 'em out."

"You fit the description I've heard of Indian-raised Navajo Tom Raine, the Arizona Ranger," Glen Parrish grunted. "I'll not bother this junk."

He gave the leather case a flip. It slapped Raine's chest, tumbled to the ground before he could grab it. The Ranger's temper boiled, but he locked his teeth on what he wanted to say. Parrish chuckled, and holstered the bone-gripped six-shooter.

"I'm glad yuh happened to come along, Parrish," Raine said. "Mebbe yuh'll help me cut for the sign of those raiders, soon as the light is a little stronger."

"I didn't just 'happen' along!" Parrish said airily. "I saw the flare of this fire from my ranch and rode over, knowing the raiders must have struck again. As for my poking around these mountains to look for the ghost of my illustrious uncle and his gunslinging firebugs, that's out. Call on Sheriff Ike Overby, at Pine Hill, if you want help."

"Oh, so yuh just saw the fire, and came over," Raine said, staring at the roaring inferno.

But Navajo Raine was actually tense with excitement, and his green eyes were like polished jade. He had been in Horse Canyon a week, doing a lot of riding between sunset and sunup. He knew it was a good eight miles from this spot to the Star headquarters. The fire had been not more than twenty minutes old when Parrish had stepped into the gate. Glen Parrish had lied brazenly, for he could not have saddled a horse and ridden eight miles in twenty minutes!

"I hear riders comin' up the canyon, Parrish," Raine said suddenly. "That'll likely mean Roy Gill and Luke Sutter, the only two farmers you've got left, have seen the fire and are coming to investigate. By the time I get things explained to 'em it will be light enough for me to follow the sign. Got a rifle I could borrow?"

"Rifle?" Glen Parrish fairly barked. "Raine, haven't you got a rifle?"

Raine forced his face to remain wooden.

"If I had a rifle, I wouldn't want yours, would I?" he countered.

Glen Parrish scowled, shuttled uneasy eyes toward the fire that was eating away house, barns, sheds and valuable stacks of meadow and alfalfa hay. Or he could have looked toward that crooked ridge behind the Ashlock's vanishing home, Raine thought grimly.

"I've no rifle, Raine," Parrish said, bringing his chill glance back to the Ranger.

"Then I'll have to depend on my sixes," Raine declared soberly.

"All you'll need will be salve to rub on the blisters you'll get, gallivanting around the country looking for those raiders," Parrish grunted.

"I know who one of the cowardly, woman-killin' dogs was, at least!" Raine said flatly.

"What do yuh mean?" Glen Parrish dropped into range vernacular again.

But Navajo Raine did not answer immediately, for two men were reining bareback mounts to a halt, their eyes goggling at the fire, at Raine and the Star owner. The new arrivals were lanky young Roy Gill, and stubby, bald-headed little Luke Sutter, the only two farmers left in the canyon, as Raine had said.

"Where's Ben and Della, Mr. Parrish?" Gill asked, his voice shaking. "And who's this salty-lookin' gent with hair?"

"Navajo Tom Raine, by the livin'!" bald little Luke Sutter shrilled. "Son, yuh've got no idea how glad I am to lay these old eyes on yuh!"

LUKE SUTTER was off his horse, pumping Raine's hand, slapping him on the back. But even in that moment there was a probing look of inquiry in Sutter's eyes.

"Well, yuh seem to know this galoot, so I reckon he's a Ranger, like he told me," Glen Parrish said grumpily.

"Know this boy?" Luke Sutter cried. "Why, I've knowed Tom since he was only a little shaver, Mr. Parrish. I knowed his famous daddy, Marshal Powder Raine, too! The marshal was bushwhacked durin' the Tonto Basin war, and the bushwackers tried to get Tom, thinkin' his dad bebbe mentioned their names before he died. Tom was so scared he took to the hills. The Navajo Injuns raised Tom."

"I've heard the story," Glen Parrish said gruffly.

"Then mebbe yuh've heard that Tom Raine hates bandits in general and bushwackers in particular, Mr. Parrish!" old Luke said grimly.

"It must be pleasin' to be so famous, Raine," Glen Parrish snorted. "Only too much praise is liable to go to a man's head, and make him think he's a lot better than he really is."

"I've never made any brags, Parrish," Raine said evenly.

"No?" the Star owner jeered. "Then what was that remark you made about bein' able to identify one of the raiders?"

"I'll leave the namin' of him to you and Roy and Luke," Raine said calmly. "Mebbe I forgot to mention it, but I killed one of those six hellions who killed Ben and Della Ashlock, then set fire to their place."

"You *what*?" Parrish yelled.

Raine strode out the gate and down across the meadow, old Luke Sutter trotting at his side. He halted beside the dead raider, his eyes cold and narrow as he looked down. He heard old Luke Sutter give a strangled yelp, and glanced at the oldster. Gill and Parrish yelled in surprise.

"Buck Halligan!" Parrish roared. "Raine, what's the meanin' of this?"

"Buck Halligan was one of the six who killed the Ashlocks and fired their place!" Raine said coldly.

"So that's it!" Glen Parrish choked wrathfully. "Yuh pulled a boner, and now yuh're cookin' up a batch of rotten lies to cover yore mistakes!"

"What yuh mean by that kind of talk?" Raine asked, his voice low and guttural with anger.

"Yuh paddle-footed fool, Buck Halligan was Sheriff Ike Overby's head deputy!" Parrish roared.

CHAPTER II

Scotched Killers

NAVAJO Tom Raine had never tried more desperately to follow sign in his whole life. He was far more skilled than the average white man, for the Indians who had raised him had schooled him patiently. Yet the Ranger knew that he was failing now.

The sun was three hours high when Raine stopped in the shade of an upslanted boulder, eyes bitter as he studied the towering, cave-pocked bluffs. He had taken the sign of that mysterious rifleman who had fired at the raiders from the ridge back of the Ashlock farm, followed the prints of the rifleman's mount weary miles over rough, brushy slopes and rocky canyon floors. But here, in this choked, crooked defile, the mysterious rifleman had ridden into a band of horses, and Raine knew he was licked.

Wampum came walking around a bend in the narrow gorge, ears flicking inquisitively. The Ranger unfastened the roan's reins from the saddle-horn, led the horse to a deep pool where the band of horses evidently had been drinking.

"The hosses were mostly all shod, which means they were some of Glen Parrish's saddle stock instead of wildies," Raine though, his eyes grim as

he glanced down at the trampled sand around the water-hole. That rifleman had been smart, for the prints of shod hoofs fanned out from the water-hole in all directions.

"It's only a shot in the dark, Wampum, but we'll try the rimrocks, cuttin' for that rifleman's sign," the Ranger muttered. "That hombre was on the ridge back of the Ashlock farm, and could shore back my story that Buck Halligan was one of them six raiders."

Raine had changed to moccasins when he discovered that he must travel on foot while following the sign of the mysterious rifleman he wanted so badly to find. He was wondering if he should slip into his boots again when a rifle began roaring, high above him!

Raine's turquoise-butted guns were in his hands as he jumped into a nest of boulder, glance sweeping upward. From a patch of cedars on the lip of the rimrock he could see powder smoke as the rifleman pumped out shot after shot. No slugs were coming Raine's way, though, and he was puzzled until he heard hoarse yells from down the canyon.

Raine's eyes narrowed, and his guns leveled. A scant fifty yards down the canyon, four men were scurrying like hawk-chased rabbits, yelling as they dived into brush and behind rocks. With rifle slugs screeching off rocks and clipping brush all around them, Raine did not blame those four gun-hung jaspers for hunting cover. And he recognized them. They were Wade Landrum, Earl Bunch, Zack Goodloe and Harry Dozier, Glen Parrish's tough Star riders.

"Cuss yuh, Raine, quit shootin' or we'll give yuh some of the same!" a harsh voice bawled from a brush patch, where Raine had seen tall Wade Landrum, Star ramrod, dive into hiding.

"Even if yuh are a Ranger, yuh Injun-hearted whelp, yuh crack ary another cap at us Star rannies and yuh'll get the liver blowed out of yuh!" called another, much deeper voice. That belonged to Zack Goodloe.

Those four Star men had been on foot, for there were no horses in sight. Raine felt a prickling sensation along his spine when he considered what could have happened to him if that rifleman up on the rimrock had not warned him that those men were sneaking up on him.

"And you're the same gent who fanned the ears of those raiders this mornin' with rifle slugs, I'd bet," the Ranger thought soberly. "Also, mister, I'll bet yuh were settin' up there snickerin' over the way I was blunderin' around down here, tryin' to figger out what to do after yuh'd fogged your sign."

Raine saw a movement down the canyon. One of those four who had taken cover — scrawny little Harry Dozier — was stretching up the back side of a slanted boulder, easing a rifle into a crevice, obviously getting set for a sneak shot at the rifleman on the rimrock. Raine let Dozier get all flattened down and sighting the rifle, then sent a slug over the boulder a scant foot from his nose.

THE SCRAWNY gunman rolled down the sloping rock, squalling like a tramped cat. His three companions began howling furious oaths. The rifle on the rimrock had popped twice in rapid succession when big, tow-headed Zack Goodloe reared up out of the brush, a six-shooter in each fist. But he dived back under cover so fast he seemed to swap ends in midair.

"Raine, I'm Wade Landrum, ramrod of the Star spread!" one of the hidden men yelled hotly. "These three men with me are Star riders. That coyote pardner of yores come in a gnat's whisker of blowin' Harry Dozier's brains out, a minute ago. One of the slugs yuh just fired blistered Zack Goodloe's neck, it come so close. Put that rifle down, cuss yuh!"

"Yuh're a little mixed up, Landrum!" Raine sang out coldly. "I don't know how you and those three bushwackers with yuh missed seein' me, close as yuh were when my pardner, up on the rim, started worrying yuh with rifle slugs."

"Yuh're Raine, the Ranger?" Landrum called.

"I'm Raine," the Ranger retorted. "Just what was the idea in tryin' to sneak up behind me, as you four shore tried to do?"

"Don't get lippy with us!" Landrum retorted. "The boss wants yuh, so waltz out of there, pronto. And whistle in that rifle artist from the rimrock, unless yuh want us Star boys to smoke him down. What's he, another fancy-pants Ranger?"

"We'll call that pardner of mine up yonder Pete, on account of I reckon that wouldn't be his name," Raine said loudly. "Who and what Pete is don't

need to concern you Star rannies. And get over the notion that I'll trot back to Glen Parrish with you."

"The boss said for yuh to larrup over to the Star with us, and yuh better do it, Raine!" Wade Landrum yelped.

"I take orders from Burt Mossman, captain and organizer of the Arizona Rangers, not Glen Parrish," Raine flung back. "I'm ridin' out of here, Landrum, right now. If you and yore men try to stop me, I reckon Pete's rifle will start talkin' again. All set, Pete?"

Raine glanced upward at the thick cedars, half hoping "Pete" would sing out. But there was no reply, and Raine was about to glance down the canyon to see how Wade Landrum and those other Star riders were behaving when he saw a white Stetson push out of the thick cedars. The Stetson, on the end of a rifle barrel, wigwagged in signal, then drew back into the thick foliage.

"What kind of dad-blasted stuff is that, now?" Landrum bawled. "Why don't that Pete hellion speak out, instead of signalin' with his hat?"

"Pete's a sort of bashful cuss," Raine jeered. "He's cross-eyed, warty-nosed, paddle-footed, and nearly seven foot tall. He's been teased so much he hates to—"

Raine ended abruptly. A bullet whacked a rock at his right, screaming off through the echoes of the rifle that came from Pete, up on the rim.

"Oh, yes, Landrum!" Raine called gravely. "I forgot to say that Pete is downright cantankerous, too. So you and yore pards better keep scrooched down."

Raine replaced the one spent cartridge in his right-hand gun, swung aboard his roan, and rode up the canyon, watching the brush and rocks where Landrum and the other Star men were hiding. They cursed and fumed, but stayed out of sight, and Raine was chuckling as he swung into the first side canyon he reached. He holstered his gun and put Wampum at the slope, hoping he could top out before Pete took to his heels.

"He hightailed!" Raine groaned, as Wampum scrambled out to the rim.

Raine saw the cedars where Pete had been bushed up, but there was no horse in sight. The Ranger loped towards the thicket, hoping he could pick up Pete's trail. He curbed Wampum at the edge of the bushes, sharp eyes studying the stony earth.

"So I'm paddle-footed, seven feet tall, cross-eyed, and have warts on my nose, have I?" a voice said severely.

"Judas Priest!" Raine yelped, goggling at the thicket from where the unmistakable feminine voice had greeted him!

The girl who walked out of the cedar thicket had a shiny rifle tucked under one arm, and was tall for a girl. She had black hair. Dark gray eyes appraised Raine sharply as he swung off his horse, touched the brim of his hat. The girl smiled, and her nose crinkled a little as he saw the Ranger's confusion.

"I'm Pete," she said.

"I'm Tom Raine, about the most surprised hombre in Arizona, Miss Pete." He laughed as their hands met in a brief, firm clasp.

"We'll get a surprise from those Star brush-poppers, and it won't be a pleasant one," the girl declared. "Let's get out of here, Tom Raine, while we're able."

RAINE led the roan and walked along beside the girl, studying her from the corner of his eye. The crown of her white Stetson came above his shoulder, and he noted the easy grace of this girl who wore scuffed cow-country boots, brush-scarred bullhide chaps, levis, and a man's tan cotton shirt.

"Pete," he asked gravely, "do yuh aim to let my curiosity sizzle me to a crisp, or will yuh tell me who yuh are, and how yuh happen to be chousin' around these roughs, whizzin' bullets at about the toughest pack of killers the Territory has ever known?"

"Here's my Biscuit pony," she said quietly. "We can talk as we ride."

She had led the way into a copse of pine timber, and Raine saw a tall blood-bay gelding standing over trailing reins, ears cocked at the girl. She pushed the rifle into a saddle scabbard and mounted swiftly and easily.

"Mind if I call you Tom?" She grinned at the Ranger.

"No reason why you shouldn't, since that's my name," he declared. "But let's make it a swap. What's yore name?"

"Pete will have to do for a while, Tom," she chuckled.

"All right, Pete," Raine said soberly. "We'll let the mystery ride. But I'm in a tight, lady, and you're the only one who can help me out. You were up on the ridge back of the Ashlock farm this

mornin', Pete, blisterin' the ears off those killin' devils who killed Ben Ashlock and his wife, then fired their place."

"It was horrible," she said.

"What I need to know, Pete, is whether or not yuh saw me tangle with the two raiders who fled west into Hoss Canyon after you scared 'em away."

"I saw two of them ride west." She nodded. "I saw guns flashing, realized that they had bumped into someone who was trying to stop them. But it was still so dark I could see only the gun flashes. You tried stopping them?"

"I tried," Raine said grimly. "One of 'em got away. But I stopped the other one, permanent."

"You got one of those raiders!" the girl cried. "Who was he, Tom?"

"Buck Halligan!" Raine said gravely.

CHAPTER III

Big Wind From Texas

RAINE would have said more, only the girl had cried out sharply, and Raine saw her face turn slowly white as she stared at him out of shock-dazed eyes.

"No!" she said tensely. "Tom Raine, you must be mistaken."

"The raider I downed was Buck Halligan, Sheriff Ike Overby's deputy," Raine said quietly. "Glen Parrish not only identified the dead raider as Buck Halligan, but started spoutin' stuff about me havin' made some kind of fool mistake."

"This is terrible!" the girl said uneasily. "Glen Parrish will have it appear that you did make a mistake in shooting Buck Halligan if he possibly can, for Halligan was one of the bunch he brought over here from California with him. And poor Ike! If you prove your story, then Ike will be in hot water over having deputized Buck Halligan. That will frighten and worry Faye."

"You seem to know Sheriff Ike and his wife, Faye, pretty well, Pete," Raine observed drily.

"Of course I know them!" the girl said. "I live with them at Pine Hill."

"What's that?" Raine asked sharply.

"Tom, I came here two months ago, from Texas," she said slowly. "I didn't know a soul in Pine Hill, and went to Sheriff Overby, asking him if there was a respectable boarding house in town where a girl could live. He laughed at me, suggested that I go see his wife if I wanted to know about local rooming houses. Faye turned out to be a cute little redhead, sweet and friendly. She insisted that I take her spare bedroom. I've been living there ever since. They think I came from Arkansas, and that my name is Ella Smith."

"Peter Ellen Smith, who was raised in Texas but came from Arkansas!" Raine snorted. "Sister, yuh're gettin' so many loose threads danglin' they're bound to trip yuh up, sooner or later."

"Gosh, Tom, don't rub it in!" she said wearily. "I feel badly enough, fooling Ike and Faye. But I'm afraid to let people around here know anything about me."

"Why?" Tom wanted to know.

"Mostly for fear my pride would be trampled in the dust."

"Now that makes sense, I suppose?" the Ranger asked gruffly.

"To a woman, yes," she said quietly, then glanced away, seeming to study the timbered ridge they were following toward the misty depths of Horse Canyon.

"Pete, Sheriff Ike is as honest as the day is long, but so slow-witted he wouldn't have gumption enough to jump in the creek if his pants caught fire," Raine said gravely. "With a smooth talker like Glen Parrish whoopin' up the yarn that I shot Buck Halligan by mistake, Overby may try to give me trouble. If I can't make him listen to reason, will you tell him what yuh saw at the Ashlock farm this mornin'?"

"Even if I had to lay all my cards on the table, and get my pride kicked all over Pine Hill's streets, Tom, I'd not see you get into trouble over killing Buck Halligan," she said soberly.

"Fair enough, Pete," Raine sighed in relief.

"I understand that you grew up here with the Navajo Indians," she remarked.

"That's true." He nodded, puzzled by a strange gravity in her level gray eyes.

"Then you've known this country long and well, and you've know the people who have lived here, too," she said. "Did you happen to know Sam Parrish, the founder of the vast Star Ranch his nephew, Glen Parrish, now claims?"

"I knew Sam Parrish well," Raine re-

plied. "Until his game old heart quit him six months ago, I dropped in at that mansion he called a ranchhouse just as often as I could."

"Why, you liked him!" the girl said, and there was an odd catch in her low-toned voice.

"Sam Parrish was a fine old gentleman, and my friend," Raine said simply.

"I've heard such different stories about him." She frowned. "Didn't he keep a bunch of tough cowhands on his ranch? And didn't Sam Parrish and his hard-case riders gun a bunch of settlers out of Horse Canyon, ten or eleven years ago?"

"Sam Parrish and his brush-poppin' cowhands smoked a batch of squatters out of Hoss Canyon." Raine nodded. "Parrish then bought the canyon, and added it to his Star range."

"But wasn't that a bullying thing for him to do?" the girl countered sharply.

"Those so-called squatters Sam Parrish choused out were actually gun-slingers, hired by Crill Yarbie, California sheep king," Raine chuckled. "Old Sam knew that Yarbie would have his range-spoilin' woollies scattered all over Star range if he let them gunmen prove up on those homesteads. So Sam bounced those California brush-apes before they got a legal toe-hold."

"You knew Mr. Parrish's family, too, I suppose?" the girl asked.

SOMETHING in her voice caused Raine to glance at her sharply.

"No, I didn't know his family," he said quietly. "I understand that his brother, Walt Parris, was a California land shark who operated around Los Angeles until a few years ago. It seems Walt left California with the authorities snatchin' at his coat tails for some kind of big swindle, and that he's roostin' in South America now. When Sam Parrish died, Glen, his brother's son, came here from Los Angeles to claim the Star spread."

"Didn't Sam Parrish ever mention his wife and daughter?" the girl asked.

"Wife and daughter?" Raine chuckled. "If Sam was alive to hear that, he'd shore get a laugh. Sam was a bachelor."

"Twenty-seven years ago Sam Parrish married Nadine Caudell, daughter of a Tucson attorney, and brought her up here to the Star Ranch," the girl said, almost gently. "Two years later their daughter was born. They named the baby Kay Ellen. Nadine Parrish died before her baby was six months old."

"Pete, what in the name of time are you sayin'?" Raine asked sharply.

"It was seventy miles to the closest doctor," the girl went on gravely. "Sam thought his wife would have lived, had he been able to get help sooner. Fearing the baby would die before the doctor could be reached, he put the child in the care of a young couple who had flopped at homesteading up here, and sent them out to a more civilized country. Sam Parrish sent that couple three hundred dollars each and every month for his daughter's support until his sudden death, six months ago."

"Where did yuh hear any such tale?" Raine asked gravely.

"I pieced the story together, mostly from unguarded remarks made by the shiftless, booze-swilling couple who squandered Sam Parrish's money on parties instead of using it to clothe, feed, and educate his daughter," Pete said calmly. What I've just told you is not a fairy tale, Tom. I happen to be Kay Ellen Parrish!"

"Great, jumpin' Jupiter!" Raine cried. "Girl, yuh got any idea what sort of a stir this will create? Your father—"

"Look out!" Kay Parrish shrilled.

The Ranger's green eyes turned as hard as polished glass then, for he saw a big, pot-bellied man come spurring out from behind a windfall, riding straight toward them. The man's bloated, whiskery face was twisted in a savage leer, and he was bawling Kay Parrish's name.

He had a six-shooter in his right fist the moment he halted his horse. He leveled the gun at Raine.

"Hightail, Injun!" he sneered. "Where I come from, Injuns don't get in a white man's way. Beat it, hominy-eater, before I twist a slug through yore middle!"

Navajo Tom Raine was neither angry nor frightened. Wooden-faced, he studied the whiskery, half-tipsy man who was pointing a gun at him. The fellow was so angry he had the shakes, and his bloodshot blue eyes were bitterly accusing as he glared at Kay Parrish.

"Rod, how—how did you find me?" she asked uneasily.

"How'd I find yuh!" the man called Rod howled. "Yuh slipped off and left Sally and me, after we'd slaved for yuh all yore life. But I had sense enough

to figger that yuh'd come up here, aimin' to grab yore pa's fortune and leave poor Sally and me out in the cold."

"Rod, that isn't fair!" Kay said sharply. "You and Sally lost no time in telling me that you had no intentions of supporting me after my father's death stopped the checks he sent you each month."

"Yuh jumped at the chance to skitter away, aimin' to come here and claim yore pa's ranch and money, that's what yuh done!" Rod fumed. "But quit gabblin' fambly secrets in front of this dog-eatin' Injun!"

He turned his bloodshot eyes on Raine, whisker-stubbled lips skinning back from yellowed teeth.

"Mebbe yuh don't savvy white man lingo, war-whoop!" he growled. "But yuh savvy bullet, which is what yuh'll get if yuh don't light a shuck!"

"Heap big wind, blow-um all the way from Texas, mebbe?" Raine asked, his voice guttural.

"Don't quarrel with him, Tom!" Kay said hastily. "He's Rod Joyner. Rod and his wife, Sally, are the couple I was telling you about. They raised me on their Boxed J Ranch, down in Texas."

"So yuh've been peddlin' fool talk to a mangy Injun, have yuh?" Rod Joyner roared. "Gal, yuh'll git a quirtin' that'll shore . . . Hey, let go of me!"

THE Ranger's right hand shot out, sinewy fingers clamping over Joyner's hairy wrist, hiking the gun-filled hand skyward. The pistol was wrenched from Joyner's hand before the mouthy tough knew what was happening.

"Tom, don't hurt him!" Kay Parrish cried.

Rod Joyner was yanked out of saddle, slammed down to the thick carpet of pin needles. He rolled over twice, and sat up, blinking dazedly. Raine looked down at him coldly.

"Yuh ain't no Injun!" Joyner gulped.

"Rod, this is Tom Raine, Arizona Ranger!" Kay Parrish cried.

"Yuh've went and blabbered to the blasted law, have yuh?" Joyner roared. "Well, that ain't about to do yuh no good. Yuh're waltzin' back to Texas with me. I've worked me out a new deal with this cousin of yores, Glen Parrish. Soon as I found out yuh hadn't gone snifflin' around him, I seen a chance to set me and Sally up well again. From now on, I'll pull down a hunnert dollars more a month for yore keep than yore pa paid me."

Rod Joyner, getting to his feet, seemed to ignore Raine, but the Ranger was not caught napping when the Texan whirled suddenly, launching a savage kick at him. Raine took the bruising blow on his thigh, then leaned behind a brown fist that popped against Joyner's chin. The Texan's eyes rolled back until they showed only the bloodshot whites, his dissipated features went lax, and he came down, out cold.

"Let's get out of here, Tom!" Kay Parrish said tensely. "I want to get to Pine Hill, pack my things, and get away before Rod can stop me."

"Are you daft, Kay Parrish?" Raine asked sharply.

"A little, I suppose, or I'd never come here at all," she said soberly. "All I can do now is get out of here, unless I want to be greatly embarrassed."

"Embarrassed?" Raine snapped. "Don't yuh know there isn't a court in the land that won't hand over yore father's estate to yuh?"

"Tom, my father absolutely ignored me, all my life," Kay said huskily. "He sent a check to Rod and Sally each month, of course, to pay for my keep, but he never wrote a single line to me, never sent me any kind of present. The only three letters I ever wrote to him were never answered. He hated me, because I was born a girl instead of a boy, and because he felt that my coming into the world caused my mother's death. He died without having made any provision for me, so I would not humble myself by going to court and claiming the estate he did not want me to have."

"Kay," Raine said slowly, "there's somethin' phony in this deal. I knew Sam Parrish. He never hated anyone or anythin' in his life. Sam would have been the proudest and happiest man in the world if he'd known the lovely, intelligent girl who is Kay Ellen Parrish."

"Your opinion of me is flattering, Tom," Kay said soberly. "But I think my father's actions speak clearly enough. I'm getting out of this country before—"

"Shhhh!" Raine warned sharply. "Hop off that hoss and get behind a tree, Kay. Somebody is headin' this way!"

Raine liked the way the girl obeyed without asking questions. She was off

her horse and crouching behind the scaly bole of a hung pine by the time he got behind a tree.

"Where?" she asked guardedly.

"Comin' up this ridge towards us," Raine replied. "A lone rider, travelin' slow."

"I saw him then, beyond that brown windfall!" the girl said coolly. "But I had only a glimpse. Do you know him?"

"Can't tell whether I do or not, in all this shadow," Raine said cautiously. "When he comes around that down timber, though . . . Oh, me!"

Raine's voice ended in a smothered groan. The rider had come from behind the windfall, snapping erect in the saddle when his horse whinnied. He was big, and so fat he seemed to bulge over the saddle he sat. He yanked his mount to a dead stop, broad, pink-white face scowling as he reached for the shiny stock of a rifle that was in a scabbard slanted under his left leg.

"It's Sheriff Ike!" Kay called sharply. "Gollies, Tom, you won't tell him who I really am, will you?"

"Yuh won't need the rifle, Ike," the Ranger called loudly. "It's me, Tom Raine."

CHAPTER IV

A Proddy Sheriff

SHERIFF Ike Overby laid his rifle across the bow of his saddle, and gigged his stout dun horse forward, scowling darkly. He put sharp blue eyes on Rod Joyner's sprawled figure, then looked at Raine as the tall Ranger stepped from behind the tree bole.

"Dog yuh, Tom, what have yuh been up to?" the sheriff asked, his voice a deep rumble of angry sound.

Kay stepped from behind the tree, rifle tucked under her arm, a friendly smile on her pretty face.

"I see yuh're all right, Ella, even if yuh are in sort of bad company," the sheriff said, and sighed deeply.

"Why, of course I'm all right, Ike," the girl laughed. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"Well, yuh poked off up here to hunt turkeys again, a long time before daylight," the sheriff grumbled. "Then the news comes to town that them pesky raiders had struck the Ashlock place, and when I got out there I heard how this Raine galoot had tracked some of them raiders back this way. I was worried, thinkin' mebbe they could have run into you."

"I met Miss—uh—Smith up here, just a short while ago," Raine offered.

The sheriff glared at him.

"Dad-blame yuh, Tom, what'd yuh go and kill Buck Halligan for?"

Raine quietly explained that he had witnessed the raid on the Ashlock farm, and how he had spotted two of the raiders racing away from the flaming farm buildings.

"I ordered 'em to halt, Ike," he finished grimly. "They opened up on me with six-shooters. I chose the big one because he made a better target, and shot him off his hoss."

"The galoots who hold the purse strings of this county are too blamed stingy to allow a regular deputy," the sheriff said grimly. "I deputized Buck Halligan, give him a badge and commission. He drawed pay when I set him on special jobs, which wasn't often. But he was my deputy, Tom, and I don't believe he was one of them raiders!"

"Ike, Glen Parrish give yuh the idea that I killed Buck Halligan by mistake!" Raine snapped. "But I didn't kill that dirty son by mistake. I'll write a report of it if yuh want me to. But exactly the way I've told it to you."

"Get mule-headed, Raine, and I'll give yuh fits!" the sheriff fumed. "And don't start shootin' off yore mouth about Glen Parrish, neither. Yuh whistle up that Pete feller, and let's get on to town and make out that report."

"Pete?" Raine drawled, and stole a quick glance at Kay, who gasped.

"Dog bite yuh, Raine!" the sheriff exploded. "On my way up this ridge, I run onto Wade Landrum, Earl Bunch, Zack Goodloe and Harry Dozier. Them four Star rannies was hunkered down in a batch of brush, lookin' plenty sore. When I ask 'em what they thought they was up to, they said they was waitin' to collar you and some feller named Pete, aimin' to find out why you and this Pete galoot throwed slugs at them without no cause a-tall. Now quit stallin', call that Pete jigger in, and let's go!"

"Let's talk about this geezer a while, Ike," Raine changed the subject, nod-

ding toward Rod Joyner, who was beginning to stir.

"Yeah, what'd yuh do to him, and why?" the sheriff snapped.

"He got to usin' bad language in Miss —uh—Smith's hearin', so I biffed him one." Raine shrugged.

"The galoot says his name is Rod Joyner," the sheriff rumbled, "and claims he's from Texas, and has been showin' up in Pine Hill every night for over a week, gettin' soused at the bars, and shootin' off his big mouth about how rich and important he is. I've seen him slippin' around my house, watchin' Ella, there."

"Oh, my heavens!" Kay said sharply.

"Well, Miss Ella is a mighty lovely girl, Ike," Raine said drily. Mebbe this Rod Joyner hombre is romantic, eh?"

Joyner was looking up at Raine, bloodshot eyes beginning to narrow. Suddenly his bearded lips kinked in a sneering grin, and he came slowly to his feet, chuckling as he brushed pine needles from his clothing.

"Yuh're a smart feller, Raine," he cackled. "Shore, I was so took with—er—Miss Elly Smith's looks that I couldn't help chousin' past the sheriff's yard for a glimpse of her. I'm glad yuh explained it to the sheriff, Raine. Keep stringin' yore bets that way, and yuh'll get along."

"All right, Pete, I'll remember," Raine said.

"Pete?" Joyner blinked.

"Oh, Pete, huh?" the sheriff asked slowly. "This feller a lawman, Tom?"

"Me a badge-man?" Joyner glared. "Listen, Fatty! Down in Texas, we tromp lawmen the way you yokels step on vinegaroons. Why, if a feller with a badge on him was to show his face after sunset, some schoolboy would up and . . . Hey, what yuh tryin' to do?"

ROD Joyner was yelling wildly as Ike Overby grabbed him by the flanks, swung him off his feet, then slammed him down on his back. Joyner bounced to his feet, bloodshot eyes goggling at the shiny handcuffs that linked his wrists.

"Mebbe yuh're so tough yuh live on a straight diet of fried badge-men and scrambled buzzard eggs, mister!" Ike Overby told him coldly. "But if yuh don't want to take up a plumb permanent address in my jail, yuh better start figgerin' out a good excuse for havin' tried to bushwhack Wade Landrum and them other Star rannies."

As they walked to their horses, Kay whispered: "Tom Raine, you did that deliberately!"

"Did what?" Raine asked.

"You called Rod Joyner Pete, knowing, or at least hoping that Ike would arrest him!" the girl accused.

Raine waited until they had mounted and ridden ahead of Sheriff Overby and the still flabbergasted prisoner. He looked soberly at Kay then.

"Rod Joyner may hold the answer to Sam Parrish's strange actions towards you, Kay," the Ranger said grimly. "Overby is so sore at me he wouldn't have locked him up had I simply asked him to. Besides, I want to throw a scare into Glen Parrish by letting him find out that Joyner has been picked up. While Glen is gettin' the shakes because Joyner is in the juzgado, you and I will go have a little talk with Judge Ross Eyler."

"Rod does seem to have made some sort of deal with Glen," the girl said. "Since I've certainly more legal grounds for claiming my father's estate than Glen has, Glen and Rod could both get into trouble, I imagine. But why should Glen Parrish and Rod Joyner think they can handle me as if I were a child!"

"That has me puzzled, too," Raine said. "And the strange way yore father acted towards yuh is puzzlin' me even more. Kay, Sam Parrish just wasn't the kind of man who would have turned a cold shoulder to his own daughter."

"Rod and Sally always told me my father hated me," she said. "And if he didn't, why did he refuse to answer my letters, Tom?"

"How long ago did yuh write to yore father?" the Ranger asked.

"I wrote the first letter the year I was thirteen, on my graduation from grade school," Kay answered promptly. "I wrote the next one four years later, when I finished high school. I sent the third, and last, the year I was twenty-one, thanking my father for all he had done for me, and telling him I felt I could make my own way from then on. He answered none of the letters, and kept right on sending money for Rod and Sally to whoop off on gay parties until his death, six months ago."

"In any of those letters, did yuh

tell yore father what sort of people he was allowin' to raise yuh?" Raine asked.

"I did not," Kay said firmly. "Nor did I tell my father that I went to school so shabbily clad the other kids made fun of me until Mrs. Jessop, a neighbor who had a daughter larger and older than I was, started making over that daughter's out-grown clothing for me. Mrs. Jessop taught me to sew, and after that I could make over Sally Joyner's clothes, although I had to do some scheming, for Sally is little, about the size of Glen Parrish's wife."

"Glen Parrish's wife?" Raine asked. "I didn't know that rooster was married."

"His wife has been on the Coast for almost a month, visiting her parents," Kay explained. "But she's due back next week, and Glen is giving a barbecue and dance at the ranch, with the whole country invited. You should go, Tom. Just seeing Glen's wife should be worth any man's time, for she is the cutest creature you ever saw. With her golden hair in ringlets, and those huge, violet eyes and long, black lashes, she looks more like a big wax doll than a living, breathing human."

"The baby-doll type, eh?" Raine said absently. "Now about these letters yore father never answered, Kay. Did yuh mail 'em . . . Hey, wait a minute!"

"What's wrong?" Kay asked uneasily, for Raine's voice had ended on a yell.

"This gal Glen Parrish is married to!" he said sharply. "A doll-faced, yellow-haired little trick with big blue eyes, you said. Yuh happen to know if her name is Nell?"

"Why, yes!" Kay looked surprised. "Do you know her?"

"*Know* her!" Raine yelled. "Good, screamin' grief, Kay, there's the answer to the raids on the farms in Hoss Canyon."

KAY'S mouth formed a crimson O, and her eyes widened slowly. But Raine seemed not to notice. He hipped around in the saddle, his lean face a little pale as he looked back at Sheriff Ike Overby and Rod Joyner.

"Whip Joyner's hoss across the tail, and slam the spurs to that bronc of yores, Ike!" Raine bawled. "We've got the killin' raiders of Hoss Canyon farms where we want 'em now!"

Raine heeled Wampum into a run. The hefty sheriff was bawling angrily, reaching for the rifle under his left knee. But Kay Parrish had spun her horse, and was racing back to the sheriff's side. Raine saw her grab Overby's arm, talking rapidly. The sheriff pushed his rifle back into the scabbard.

Kay snatched the lariat off the pommel of her saddle, reined in behind the sheriff and Rod Joyner, and almost got Joyner unhorsed by slapping his mount across the hips with the free end of the rope. Sheriff Overby put spurs to his horse, and Raine saw him motioning frantically, wanting him to wait.

But Raine did not wait. He sent Wampum down the ridge at a fast clip, keeping a couple of hundred yards ahead of the other three riders. When he got down into Horse Canyon and hit the wagon road, he had to let Wampum hit a still faster stride, for the sheriff was crowding him harder now, and Kay's lashing rope kept Rod Joyner's horse nose to nose with the sheriff's mount. Not until they had roared down Candy Creek for three miles, then swung up to the bench where Pine Hill sprawled along the base of the slope, did the Ranger haul his fleet mount in, allowing the others to overtake him.

"I'll cripple yuh, Tom, so help me!" Ike Overby bawled. "What's this Ella tells me about yuh throwin' a fit when yuh heard Glen Parrish's purty little wife is named Nell?"

"Get me to a saloon!" Rod Joyner croaked. "A quart-a-day Texas man like me don't cotton to bein' choused across the landscape like a rustled yearlin'. Directly I've put a couple of stiff drinks under my belt, I'll bunch you two badge-polishers up and whip yuh both off yore feet. Then I'll take my quirt to this gal. Yuh three ought to know better than to wart a tough hand like me!"

"Get that big wind behind bars, Ike!" Raine said coldly. "And unless yuh want him killed by a bullet or buckshot fired through a cell window, put a guard around yore jail."

"Yuh must be locoed!" the sheriff snorted. "Who would bother with shootin' a second-rate chicken thief like this Joyner?"

"The five remainin' members of the gang that has been raidin' farms in Hoss Canyon are the bunch who will be tryin' to shut Joyner's mouth!" Raine said

coldly. "I see 'em up along the street yonder, right now. They're watchin' us, Ike."

"Where?" the sheriff gulped. "Who are them raiders?"

"Yonder is Glen Parrish, standin' in front of the post office," Raine droned. "The chunky, red-headed galoot leanin' against the barber pole at Tony Moreno's shop is Earl Bunch. Wade Landrum is settin' on the bank steps. The big, towhead lookin' out the blacksmith's door is Zack Goodloe. That scrawny, mink-eyed thing squattin' in the shade of the Busy Beaver Saloon wall is Harry Dozier, the runty raider who was with Buck Halligan when I killed Halligan."

"Tom, are you sure?" Kay Parrish asked in a low, startled voice.

"Yuh're locoed, Tom Raine!" the big sheriff repeated. "Why, accusin' Glen Parrish and his men of bein' them raiders don't make a lick of sense. Shore, them farms in Hoss Canyon are on Star land. The farms was sold to the farmers on long-term payment plans by Sam Parrish. If somethin' happened to the farmers, Glen would get the land back through default. But that little ol' dab of land ain't valuable enough to make Glen turn to killin', so quit talkin' such nonsense!"

"The farm land in Hoss Canyon ain't valuable enough to make Glen turn to killin' and arson to get it," Raine said flatly. "Knowin' that is what has kept me from collarin' him and his California gunnies. But Crill Yarbie, the California sheep king, would order his high-paid gun-slingers to kill them farmers and burned their homes to get that land. Ownin' every foot of Hoss Canyon would heal the wound Yarbie's pride suffered when Sam Parrish kicked his sheep-scented hirelin's out of Hoss Canyon, ten or so years back!"

"Crill Yarbie would order anything done that'd wipe out the memory of Sam Parrish scotchin' his range-grabbin' try over here." The big sheriff glared at Raine. "But go spoutin' talk like that, Tom, and yuh'll stir up trouble. Glen Parrish shore wouldn't be lettin' Crill Yarbie or anybody else give him orders."

"Guess again, Ike!" Raine said grimly. "And don't forget Nell, Glen Parrish's cute little wax-doll of a wife."

"What in blazes has Nell Parrish got to do with this?" the sheriff snapped.

"A lot, I reckon," Raine said evenly. "Or don't you know that she was Nell Yarbie, Ike, before her marriage to Glen Parrish?"

"Yarbie?" the sheriff and Kay cried in the same breath.

"She was Nell Yarbie," Raine said. "But keep what yuh know under yore hat, cock your pistol, and get set for a showdown that will likely spill blood in yore street and leave scars on yore hide."

"Dog bite yuh, Tom Raine!" the sheriff groaned. "Blamed if I know whether to believe yuh or not."

"I can tell by the way yuh've clabbered up that yuh don't want to believe me," Raine replied. "But here's somethin' else to chew on, Ike. This young lady you know as Ella Smith is really Kay Ellen Parrish, Sam Parrish's own flesh and blood daughter. That drunken Joyner there raised Kay, so ask him whether that's the truth or not. Kay and me will seeyuh later, so get yore eyes back in their sockets, get the slack out of yore jaw, and remember what I said about the showdown!"

CHAPTER V

Flaming Guns

EVERYONE called tall, white-haired Ross Eyler "Judge," although he had quit the bench to go into private practice. Navajo Tom Raine and the attorney shook hands across Eyler's paper-littered desk.

"It's good to see you again, 'lad!" Eyler said heartily. "I heard you were at the Ashlock farm this morning when those fiends killed those poor kids. Tom, *do* something about those inhuman devils, won't you?"

The white-haired attorney's lean face worked with emotion, and his dark eyes shuttled from Raine to Kay Parrish. The girl sank down in a chair Raine offered her, face pale, slim hands tightly clinched.

"Sorry, Ella," Eyler said quickly. "I shouldn't have spoken so thoughtlessly."

"Glad you two know each other," Raine said crisply.

He dropped into a chair beside Kay, touched her hands reassuringly.

"I've known Ella practically from the

day she came here," Judge Eyler said, and smiled. "I've known Ike Overby and the girl he married since they were toddlers. Being a bachelor, I go over there a lot, ostensibly to visit, but actually for home-cooked suppers. Ella and Faye are both marvelous cooks."

"Judge," Raine said, "yuh handled legal matters for Sam Parrish for years. I want to know something you may not like telling me. But I've got to have the answer."

"So?" Eyler asked, sharp eyes stabbing the Ranger.

"Why didn't Sam Parrish make some kind of provisions for Kay Ellen Parrish, his daughter?" Raine asked bluntly.

The lawyer flinched. His eyes shuttled to Kay, who was watching him, big-eyed and nervous. Eyler looked back at Raine, a frown lumping his white brows.

"You often visited Sam," he said, "so he must have told you of his early marriage, of his wife's death, and of that terribly tragic child of his."

Kay gasped, and Raine squeezed her hand warmingly. But the damage was done. Eyler's face went grim, and there was fire in his eyes when he looked at the Ranger.

"Outside of telling you that I have held up the business of Glenn Parrish claiming his uncle's estate, and that I shall continue to do so until Sam's unfortunate daughter is taken care of, I have nothing more to say, Tom!" Obviously Judge Eyler was angry.

"Cool down, Judge!" Raine said stonily. "When Miss Smith came here, she got a little mixed up on her geography when she mentioned the place she came from. She's from Texas, not Arkansas. And she knows the Parrish girl quite well."

"Good heavens!" the lawyer groaned. "Ella, you haven't talked about that poor unfortunate girl, have you?"

"N-no!" Kay managed to gulp, and grabbed one of Raine's hands as a frightened child might have done.

"You seem to think Sam's daughter is somethin' of a tragedy, Judge," Raine observed.

"What other name could you put to her case?" the lawyer groaned. "She's twenty-five years old now, and can speak less than a half-dozen intelligible words. She has to be chained to her room like an animal at times, a raving, gibbering—"

"Stop it!" Kay wailed.

Raine grabbed her arm, squeezed warmingly again when she tried to leap to her feet.

"I thought you knew the Parrish child, Ella!" the attorney said sharply. "This should not come as a shock to you."

"So that's the how of things!" Raine spoke up quickly. "Rod and Sally Joyner wrote to Sam Parrish, telling him that his child was a hopeless mental case. When was Sam first told about that, Judge?"

"When the baby was only a year old, the Joyners warned Sam, by letter, that his daughter seemed strange," the attorney said gravely. "And down through the years the reports grew worse and worse, until poor Sam was afraid even to go see the girl."

"How terribly, terribly cruel!" Kay said shakily. "Tom Raine, do you realize what Rod and Sally Joyner have done?"

"I shore do." The Ranger nodded.

"What's this about the Joyners having been cruel?" the lawyer asked quickly.

"Judge, would you say that Ella Smith, here, is a gibbering idiot?" Raine shot the question sharply.

"Ella is one of the most sensible youngsters I've seen in a long time!" Eyler snapped. "Why did you ask me such a silly question, anyhow?"

"Because this young lady you know as Ella Smith happens to be Kay Ellen Parrish, Sam's daughter," Raine said bluntly.

THE TALL attorney said nothing for a time. He simply sagged back in his chair, long arms dangling limply down at his sides, eyes bulging slowly as he stared at the girl.

"Those letters you wrote, Kay," Raine's voice droned in the silence. "Did you mail them yourself, or trust that to those worse than rotten Joyners?"

"I gave the letters to Rod and Sally, asking them to mail them to my father," the girl said wearily. "Obviously they would not have mailed them, though, since I was supposed to be a gibbering idiot who couldn't even speak, much less write. Tom, how could Rod and Sally have done such a vicious thing?"

"For three hundred dollars a month, Kay," Raine said gravely.

"And my father died, thinking—" Kay's voice chocked off, and suddenly her face was buried in her hands.

Raine stood up, patting her shoulder sympathetically as she wept silently. He saw the lawyer stir, run a shaking hand over his face.

"There isn't some mistake about this, Tom?" the lawyer asked. "This girl isn't an imp—uh— I mean there could be no cupidity concerned in this?"

"The girl is not an imposter, and there is no attempt to work a fast shenanigan," Raine said gravely. "Rod Joyner is over yonder in jail, Judge. We can iron this all out, just as soon as Kay—"

Raine broke off. From down on the street there had come a harsh yell of rage or defiance, and now guns were booming thunderously while other voices lifted in howls of alarm. Raine ran to the front window of the lawyer's office, which looked out on the main street of Pine Hill.

Eyler's offices were over the Pine Hill Mercantile, the largest store in town, so Raine had a good view of the street. His eyes were wide and alarmed as he saw people scurrying for doorways everywhere. Then he saw big Sheriff Ike Overby walking down the street behind a bucking six-shooter, throwing slugs at squatty Earl Bunch and scrawny Harry Dozier, who were crouched behind a building corner, firing back at the sheriff. And behind Ike Overby, closing in like lobos springing at a wounded calf, were big, tow-headed Zack Goodloe and lanky Wade Landrum.

"Keep Kay Parrish up here, Judge!" Raine yelled.

"Tom, you'll kill yourself!" Kay's voice wailed.

Raine had flipped the lawyer's window up, slid his long legs over the sill, and was yanking his guns as he plummeted down to the steep roof of the wooden canopy over the boardwalk. Brittle board crackled as his moccasins came down, but the awning held him.

"Behind you, Ike!" Raine howled. "Look out!"

The big sheriff hesitated, head swinging as he looked across the dusty street and up to where Navajo Raine stood crouched on the awning. And, hesitating, the sheriff made a perfect target for the guns of Zack Goodloe and Wade Landrum. Raine saw them snap their guns up for steady shots.

Almost frantically the Ranger's own weapons roared, and he had the satisfaction of seeing Wade Landrum duck violently, gun muzzles slanting upward as his weapons belched flame and smoke. Raine flipped back the hammers of his own guns and let them fall, yet even as he fired he saw Zack Goodloe's guns belch flame that seemed to reach along the boardwalk and push Sheriff Overby out into the street's deep dust.

But Raine's slugs had not been wasted. He saw Zack Goodloe crash sideward, brace his gun-filled hands against the splintery boardwalk, and try to push himself up again. Goodloe's arms would not hold him, his face slapped the boardwalk so hard his hat bounced off, and the guns slid out of his spasmodically twitching hands.

Navajo Raine groaned behind locked teeth. The bullet which had hit his leg had been like the blow of a sledge, flinging him sideward and down. He heard triumphant whoops from down the street, and flung his body around as he hit the steeply slanted roofing, cold eyes watching Harry Dozier and Earl Bunch jump out from behind the building corner and run into the street. They were shooting as they came, and Raine heard the slugs tear into lumber around him as he let his tall body skid rapidly down to the eaves.

Raine's outstretched arms checked his fall, letting his body dangle, feet first. Then he was plummeting down, his wounded leg buckling as his feet hit the ground.

"Harry, you and Earl close in on that long-haired hellion!" Glen Parrish's voice was roaring suddenly. "If he ain't dead, earn the fightin' wages I've been payin' yuh by finishin' him off.! Wade and me will keep these Arizona salamanders off yuh!"

RAINE came up out of the billowing dust like a bent-over sapling, suddenly released. And it was a little amusing, he thought grimly, the way Earl Bunch and Harry Dozier squalled and skidded and flung wild shots, as if he were Old Nick, in person. The two badly surprised killers were less than two full strides from the snouts of Raine's guns!

The Ranger fired just twice, first with his left-hand Colt, then with the right. Harry Dozier flopped backward, screaming as he clawed at the blood-spouting wreck a bullet had made of his nose and one cheek. Earl Bunch threw his smoking guns down and toppled over into

the dirt, his stuck-pig squeal blending into Harry Dozier's screams.

A bullet brushed Raine's neck along the left side, ripping through the long hair as it passed. He pivoted, green eyes narrow and jade-bright. Glen Parrish and Wade Landrum were crawfishing toward the doorway of a hardware store, bent over smoking guns. Landrum's lips were parted under his drooping mustache, and he was cooly taking his time, bringing both guns down for steady shots.

Glen Parrish's face looked white, and he was blazing away frantically. Raine felt one of the hastily fired slugs scrape along his side, and lurched just as Landrum's guns cut loose. Then Raine's guns exploded the last cartridges they held, and when the echoes died along the street Wade Landrum and Glen Parrish were down across the boardwalk, blood wetting the splintery boards beneath them as death forever stilled their gun hands.

Raine sighed tiredly, reloaded his guns, and went limping across the dust to Ike Overby's still figure. Armed men came pouring from doorways all along the street, belatedly offering the Ranger aid. They talked and kicked up a lot of dust, but Raine paid them little attention. The sheriff was blinking up at Raine, lifting one pudgy hand to feel of a gash where Goodloe's bullet had ripped the scalp.

"Take it easy, Ike," Raine said huskily. "A slug scraped your noggin, so lie still till yore strength comes back. But why in the name of time did yuh ever start a war with that pack of hellions, man?"

"Rod Joyner got scared when I locked him up, and admitted that Ella Smith is really Kay Ellen Parrish, poor old Sam's daughter," the sheriff growled. "Joyner told me how him and his wife made Sam think his girl was crazier 'n a loon, and all of a sudden, Tom, I savvied that everything yuh'd said was gospel. I just got so hootin' mad that I hit the street with my six-pistol in my fist, aimin' to round up Glen Parrish and his men. I hollered at Dozier and Bunch to surrender, only they had different notions. They jumped behind the corner of Abe Zinn's jewelry store and started shootin' at me. Then you hollered at me to look out for somebody at my back, and before I could figger out what yuh meant, my lights went plumb out."

The sheriff was trying to get up, and suddenly there were townsmen swarming around him, giving him plenty of help. Raine stood up, eyes sweeping over the crowd.

"Get Dozier to a sawbones before he bleeds to death, Ike," Raine said levelly. "Yuh'll get a full confession that'll have old Crill Yarbie where the law has wanted him for a long time. Judge Eyler can straighten things out for Kay in no time a-tall, now."

"Yuh wasn't jokin' when yuh said there'd be blood in my street before this was settled, Tom!" the sheriff gulped. "I'll get the sawbones after that Dozier pup some of the boys took over to Cookson's feed store. Yuh've shot up some, too, so hustle up to my house. I'll fetch Ella—I mean Kay Parrish—and the doc up there, fast as I can. Mister, the way I saw Kay lookin' at yuh, it wouldn't be no time a-tall until yuh'd have the inside track with her."

"Look after Dozier," Raine grunted. "I'll see yuh later, Ike."

The Ranger limped across the street, smiling up at Kay Parrish's anxious face, framed in Judge Eyler's window.

On the trail of a crooked crew of land-grabbers, Navajo Tom Raine crosses the Border — and fights a lone battle for justice against big odds in

RANGER OUT OF BOUNDS

The Cowboy HAD A WORD for it!

by CHUCK STANLEY

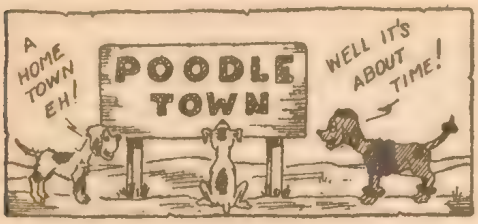
WIND and rain were blowing around the cabin of the "old-timer" on the C Bar S when the "pilgrim" pushed up on the veranda and opened the door. Water running down from his "poncho" dripped in puddles on the floor. The old cowboy who was waiting to discuss the language of the West with his literary "tenderfoot" companion looked up from the paper he had been reading.

"Shore ain't fit weather for man nor beast," he said. "But I reckon it ain't much different than the old days when I came into the Humboldt Sink country back in the Nineties."

"That's over in Nevada, isn't it?" inquired the "Arbuckle."

"Shore thing," replied the oldster, "and I'll bet you've 'sashayed' over here tonight to talk about Nevada for that collection of lingo you're accumulatin'."

"That's right," agreed the "greener." "I've been digging into some of the background myself, so I figure we ought to get a lot of good out of our discussion about the Sagebrush State."



"Sagebrush State is shore enough one of the names they hung onto Nevada," the old "mossyhorn" agreed. "But since the days of the Comstock Lode and Virginia City there are a heap of folks who call it the Silver State. Did you get any idea of how come the state got its name?"

"Sure thing," agreed the "greenhorn." "The first name given to the territory was Washoe, after one of the Indian tribes. Some of the folks who came West in the wagon trains or headed up the river from San Francisco and across the Sierra Nevadas didn't figure this was a very dignified name, so they wanted to change it. All kinds of suggestions were made. Then Congress decided that because of the mountain range, the Sierra Nevada Mountains, they would name the state Nevada. Being in Washington, the Congressmen didn't realize that most of the Sierra Mountains were in California, and that there was already a town and county in California with the name. The words Sierra Nevada also meant 'Snowed-upon Mountains', and the settlers believed that this would indicate that their state was constantly under snow, and of course it was not."

"That's plumb correct," the oldster declared. "But there was a heap of other discussion, too. I know. Folks were plenty riled up. Some of them wanted to call the place Humboldt after the Humboldt River and the Humboldt Sinks. Others reckoned it ought to be named Esmeralda after the Esmeralda Mine, one of the big diggin's there. The silver folks figured Sierra Plata, or mountain of Silver, would be a likely name. Boys who had their sights set on gold wanted to call the place Oro Plata, or Gold and Silver."

"Is it true that some of the people even suggested that since Nevada was

Our Tenderfoot Learns Some Nevada Place-Names

such a great mining state that it might be called 'Bullion'?" the "tenderfoot" inquired.

"That's as true as you're sitting there," the "mavericker" declared as he knocked the dottle out of his pipe. "Some folks figured it was just a joke, but the name was brought up before Congress."

A Name for the Baby State

The discussion of the name Humboldt had come up several times, and the youngster was curious about it. He was acquainted with the work of the great German scientist, Baron Alexander von Humboldt who lived from 1769 to 1859, but while Humboldt was famous for his travels, the "Arbuckle" did not believe he had ever been in Nevada.

"You're plumb right there," agreed the "mossy-horn." "John Charles Fremont was the fellow who gave Humboldt's name to the lake, the mountains and the river in Nevada. He was sure Humboldt-minded, all right. He even named one of the bays over in California Humboldt Bay. Fremont had a heap to do with naming things and places, and some of his names came down to the present day. Now and then he slipped up, like the time he called Lake Tahoe 'Mountain Lake.' Folks decided that Lake Tahoe was a heap more colorful."

The conversation went along to the names that were brought into Nevada as a result of the discovery of gold on the Comstock Lode, and in the vicinity of Virginia City. Here was one subject about which the wrinkled-skinned, pipe-smoking old-timer was really enthusiastic.

"Folks in the Western part of Nevada originally called the place Washoe, like we already know," he said. "That's why the Virginia City mines were first called the Washoe mines. Then some of the miners decided that a better name would be the one that was given to the mines of the Queen of Sheba back in Solomon's time, so they called the place Ophir."

"Was the final name in honor of the State of Virginia?" the "tenderfoot" broke in to ask.

The old-timer loaded his pipe, lighted it calmly, looked out through the wind- and rain-swept darkness, and shook his head.

"Not at all," he declared. "Many people like to think that, but the name goes back to a miner named James Finney. Folks had a habit of calling him 'Old Virginia' because he was one of them musical fellows who was always singing 'Carry Me Back to Old Virginia.' Since Finney was one of the first settlers, people became accustomed to calling the town 'Old Virginia's City.' The name stuck like some names have a habit of doing."

A Colossal Engineering Job

The question of the naming of the Comstock Lode itself was one that the old-timer mentioned as having been shadowed with controversy. Some folks claimed that it took its name from Theodore Bryant Comstock, an American geologist who later became Professor of Geology at Cornell, and for about fifteen years from 1879 to 1894 was the manager of the Silverton Mining Company at Silverton, California. Others claimed it was named after local miners.

"What was the Sutro tunnel at Virginia City?" the "Arbuckle" inquired.

"There was a chore," the "mavericker" declared as he blew smoke toward the ceiling of the little rain-proof cabin. "Adolph Sutro was a plumb genius when it came to engineering. Them miners got to digging so far down into the insides of Mount Davidson that they finally were thirty-five hundred feet below the surface. Then and there water started flowing into the diggin's, and it wasn't the kind you could pump out too easy. That water had a temperature of a hundred and seventy degrees Fahrenheit, and brother, that's hot! Sutro decided that the only thing to do was dig a tunnel to drain the mines. He built it, and it was a 'humdinger.' It was four miles long, and while it wasn't a complete success, it did make things a bit more pleasant down there two-thirds of a mile underground. That Sutro hombre was a right smart feller. He later got to be the Mayor of San Francisco."

The "pilgrim" was making notes rapidly.

"Didn't the Spaniards have anything to do with the discovery and settlement of Nevada?" he asked, as he paused.

"They shore did," replied the old-timer. "But it was quite a while after Coronado's expedition. Francisco Garces, a missionary of the Order of St. Francis left Sonora, Mexico in seventeen-seventy-five and crossed the south-

ern corner of the state on his way to California. The next white man anybody knows about being in the country was Peter Skene Ogden. Ogden, Utah was named after him. This Peter was working for the Hudson's Bay Company of Canada, and came down into the Nevada country with a party of trappers."

"Is it true that American citizens were the first to establish a settlement?" inquired the "greener," while he wrote.

"Plumb correct," agreed the "maverick." "Some of Brigham Young's Mormons set up a town at Genoa on the Carson River in eighteen-forty-nine."

In Honor of Kit

The old-timer pointed out that the Carson River, and Carson City, the state capital, were both named after the famous Indian scout Kit Carson who roamed and trapped all over the area.

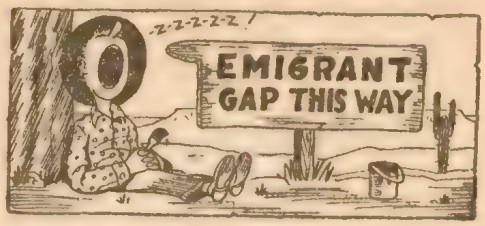
"Nevada is the kind of place that shows the background of its folks in the names it has for its towns, mountains, rivers and lakes," he explained. "They run from Spanish through Indian to American, and they're as different as the people who settled there and fought the mountains and deserts. Some folks who liked history thought of the Fathers of the Country. That's why we find places like Hamilton, named after Alexander Hamilton; Blaine, for James G. Blaine; Cleveland Ranch, recalling Grover Cleveland, and other such names. The Indians are represented by towns named Minto, Moapa, Pueblo Grande, Tuscarora, Pawnee, and the like."

The "younker" was writing as fast as he could now, and was chuckling at the wealth of information that was being placed at his disposal. His chief interest was in the names that had cropped up in the gold fields at Esmeralda and Virginia City, and later over the line in California. These were both descriptive and colorful, and included such place names as Gold Hill which was intended to describe the richness of the ore.

Another spot along the creek was known as Rich Bar. When some of the miners got too far away from the lode and found they were not locating "pay dirt," they described their claims as Hungry Camp, or Poverty Hill. Poodle Town suggested the number of dogs in the neighborhood of some of the mine operations.

The Influence of the Military

It was in Nevada that the name "diggings" came to refer to a mine, because the Easterners who were used to the



coal and iron mines, thought of a mine as something that had to go a long way into the ground before any ore could be brought up. Placer mining along the creeks changed this pattern of language and mining as well.

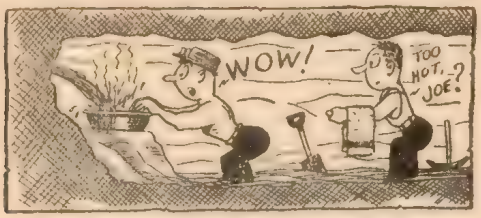
Reno, Nevada, received its name from a group of Mexican War veterans who were commanded by General Reno who died in the Civil War at the battle of South Mountain. Many of the towns in Nevada owe their names to the activities of Charles Crocker, one of the builders of the Central Pacific Railroad, and to General Grenville M. Dodge, builder of the Union Pacific.

Crocker liked to retain as many of the old pioneer names as he could, and a good many of them are still found across Nevada, between Reno and the Utah border. These included such names as Emigrant Gap, Battle Mountain, and Wells. The site of the station at Reno was once known by the name of Truckee Meadows.

One of the names in Nevada that particularly stirs the memory on New Year's Day is Auld Lang Syne Peak in the Humboldt Mountains. Some of the other mountain ranges and peaks in the state have equally interesting names. In the southwestern part of the state, cavalrymen who frequently moved through the country on Indian expeditions and while guarding wagon trains, stage coaches, and freight wagons, called one range of mountains the Reveille Mountains, because they saw these ranges in the morning when the bugle sounded reveille.

Among other novel names are the Grape Vine Mountains, Cedar Mountains, Excelsior Mountains, Black Rock Range, Spotted Range, Hot Spring Range, Hot Creek Range. The names of some of these mountains and their deri-

vations are obvious. The Cedar Mountains were topped by the trees of this type. Excelsior Mountains were remi-



niscent of the shout of the successful mountain climber in the poem "Excelsior." The Black Rock and Spotted Range Mountains described the appearance of the rocks on the mountains. The Hot Spring and Hot Creek Ranges indicated the presence of hot water and sulphur water springs.

The young tenderfoot busily wrote down all these names, before he looked up at the old "mavericker" to ask:

"Were there any other names that were selected merely because they described natural phenomena in Nevada?"

Plenty of Imagination

The oldster chuckled. Then he checked his pipe, and strolled around for moments to get the kinks out of his old legs before resuming.

"Son," he said then, "there were plenty of other places that were named in the simplest way that came to the cowboys, freighters and other folks who moved through that country in the past hundred years. I can think of a half dozen or more. For instance, there was Alkali Flat, Salt Marsh, Borax, Meadow Valley, Limestone Peak, Butte Mountains. Matter of fact, there are several spots in the state of Nevada known as Alkali Flat, and that just about describes 'em."

The old-timer explained the derivation of the other names, remarking that Borax was reminiscent of the Death Valley days when twenty-mule teams brought out this important natural mineral. Meadow Valley was the English or American translation of Las Vegas. The Spanish name is still the name of the city at the south end of Meadow Valley.

"Some folks looked back to the time of the Spaniards from the historic standpoint," declared the oldster, "and they named places after Cortez and Montezuma. Then some who like the poetic names of precious stones were responsible for naming the Ruby and Diamond Mountains, the town of Garnet, and other spots."

"How about the settlers who liked to name places after their wives and sweethearts?" suggested the younker.

"They hit Nevada, too." The "mavericker" laughed, knocking his pipe out and settling down for the conclusion of his discussion. "For instance there was Jean, Miriam, Ioe, Libby, and some sentimental and literary feller named towns after Charlotte and Emily Bronte."

The greenhorn made these notes in his book, then pushed back his hat and studied some comments he had made.

"I've got some more names here I thought were downright interesting," he remarked, "and we haven't mentioned any of them so far. There's Red House, Rebel Creek, Mount Blitzen, Bullfrog, Basalt, Alamo, Steptoe, Mound House,

Schurz, Wellington, Dixie Valley, and Haystack Peak."

Surprised German Settlers

The old-timer agreed that these were colorful designations, and some of them had stories that were well worth recalling. Both Rebel Creek and Dixie Valley were reminders of the people who came out to Nevada after the War Between the States and settled down in places that were named as a challenge and a memory of the past.

Red House was a name that might have been given to every railroad section house on the Central Pacific, because of the habit of painting all buildings with red lead which was the cheapest paint of the period. The town which retains the name to this day is located just east of Winnemucca in the shadow of Winnemucca Peak.

Mount Blitzen recalled the first sight of a mountain peak by a party of German settlers who saw the rocky slopes shining in lightning flashes. Alamo was named in honor of the many Texans who had fought and died for Texas Independence at San Antonio. Schurz and Wellington recalled the successes, both military and diplomatic, of two heroes

of the European settlers—Carl Schurz and the Duke of Wellington, conqueror of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Bullfrog got its name because the brownish-green frog was the only sign of life encountered by a disappointed settler when he reached a nearby spring. Basalt described the black rocks in its vicinity. Haystack Peak, like a number of its neighbors in the Sagebrush State, gained its title from the shape of the rock which made it up.

"I think I've done all right on Nevada," the "greener" declared happily. "But I'm sure expecting something a lot different to explain the place names when we move over into Utah in our next discussion."

"You'll shore get 'em," the "maverickker" declared. "Those Mormons had plenty of ideas, and they shore used 'em in namin' places and things. Well, goodnight, son."

The "younker" climbed into his slicker, carefully put away his notebook, and headed out into the rain.

Roundup of Best Western Fiction!

READERS, get ready for Western action thrills! Look forward to our next issue—featuring LOVABLE LIARS, a grand Tombstone and Speedy novelet by W. C. Tuttle that presents the wandering waddies at their funniest and best! Also—WASHED IN BLOOD, an unusual novelet of range combat by A. Leslie, and RANGER OUT OF BOUNDS, a new Navajo Raine yarn by Jackson Cole. In addition to these headliners, there will be many other stories and features by your favorite authors.

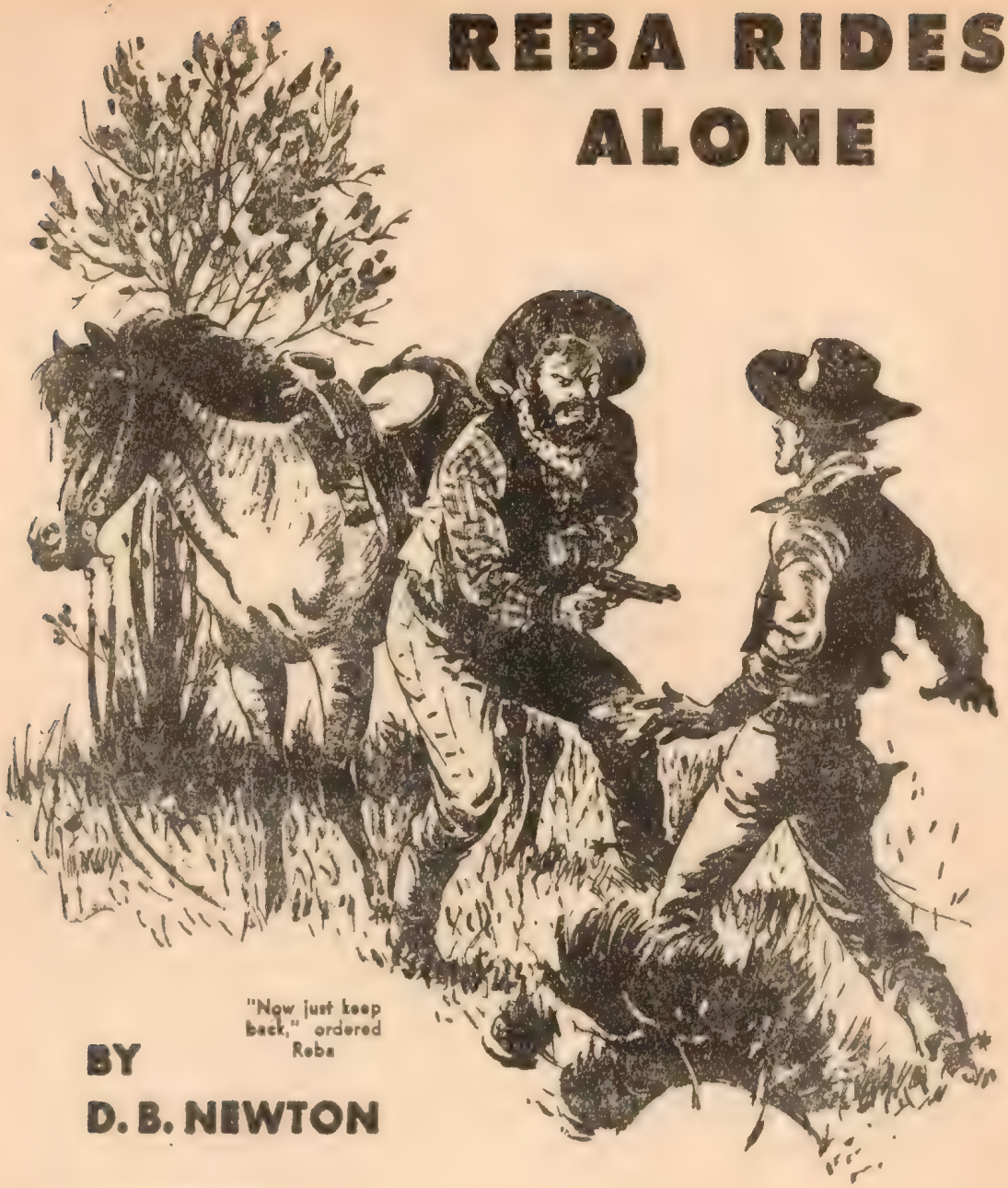
AMERICA'S top-flight Western writers in TRIPLE WESTERN—which features three outstanding novels in every issue! The selections for August are TROOPERS WEST, by Forbes Parkhill—WHITE HORSE MESA, by Ormand Clarkson—and RANDY OF ROARING RIVER, by Frank C. Robertson. A big quarter's worth at all newsstands!

NO character has endeared himself to Western fans more than Captain Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid, whose exploits are the theme of the full-length novels appearing in every issue of our companion magazine, THE RIO KID WESTERN. In the August issue, PASSPORT TO PERDITION by Gunnison Steele—one of the Rio Kid's most exciting adventures to date! Now on sale—only 15c per copy.

GLAMOROUS thrills of the rodeo arena in every issue of RODEO ROMANCES, a magazine that brings you all the action and romance of the cowboy contests. The August issue, now on sale, features TIGER OF THE TANBARK by Walker A. Tompkins, DEVIL IN THE DRIVE SEAT by Harold F. Cruickshank, and many other novelets, stories and features.

ENTERTAINING reading on every page of GIANT WESTERN, the big action-packed magazine of the best in fiction! The full-length novel in the Summer issue, WATER, GRASS AND GUNSMOKE, by L. P. Holmes, is followed by THE MARK OF CAIN, a dramatic novelet by W. C. Tuttle, and many other novelets and stories of top-flight quality. Now on sale—only 25c per copy at all stands!

REBA RIDES ALONE



"Now just keep back," ordered Reba

BY

D. B. NEWTON

A posse at his heels,

Dave Wall meets a hombre of the back trails!

HE was only a youngster, really, but he had ridden hard and far, and black thoughts had ridden with him. Gaunted, grimy cheeks were clouded with day-old blond beard stubble that made a rasping sound as he scraped the knuckles of one hand across them and waited for his lathered bronc to drink. Utter tiredness showed in every line of man and mount.

The horse, a stockinged sorrel, wanted to thrust its muzzle eye-deep into the refreshing coolness of this purling mountain stream but the rider held it back. He had slipped the bit, loosened the cinches and run his hand up under the sweaty blanket. Now, though his own throat felt lined with cotton and powdered dust, he held off long enough to study his surroundings out of tired, aching, eyes.

Mountain alder and aspen, golden from the first frosts, twinkled their leaves under an arching blue dome of sky. A spruce slope stretched below, and behind him a whitecap reared above the needle-littered trail. Wild, deserted country. The Harronville posse was still an hour on the backtrail, a narrow margin of time but enough to work with. As soon as his horse had rested a moment, he would tighten the latigos and swing up through the bed of this rippling current, not downstream as the posse would probably expect him to. A shining outcrop of granite marked a place where he could quit the water without leaving tracks. After that—north in a wide loop across the ridges, and by nightfall he would be all right.

That is to say, he'd have his liberty. Further than that there was no pleasure in considering. . . .

The cry of a camp robber off somewhere among the pines began and died. He heeled around sharply, watching for the flash of blue through green tree heads while his right hand flicked hastily toward his holstered gun. But though he waited, crouched there beside his horse, no other sound came. Finally he straightened, forcing the tension out of him, but feeling a little shaky by his scare.

"Shucks," the young man whispered into the stillness. "You got to get control of yourself. From now on, anything that makes a noise could be waiting to jump!"

The sorrel had finished drinking. The man dropped the reins, moved upstream a few feet and at the very edge of the water squatted down on the heels of his worn, brush-scratched Justins. He began drinking out of his cupped hands, dipping up the water and gulping it eagerly between cracked and bearded lips. The cool water ran down his bony wrists, down the front of his sweat-caked shirt.

A voice said: "All right, mister. Don't try anything. I want that sorrel—"

A more experienced man might have known he was caught dead rights, with no sane chance of making a play, but desperation had this youngster at hair-spring tension.

At the first sound of the words his control snapped. He came around, gun-hand whipping back while his glance sought wildly to locate the speaker. He caught just a glimpse of a face, of sun-glinting revolver barrel. . . Then, in that awkward position, his bootheel slipped on the muddy edge of the creek and next moment he was going in with a splash of silvery water. His finger crimped the trigger of the gun that had barely cleared leather when he fell.

The creek closed over his head momentarily, ran cold into his nose and open mouth. He thrashed wildly. Then he was clawing at the grass of bank, and powdersmoke hung in a thick cloud about him. His gun had driven its bullet straight into the muddy bank ripping a deep hole there.

He got his elbows and upper body flopped over onto the land and tried to bring his gun level on the spot where he had seen that face. But there was nothing but the pine trunks, the green cloud of brush. For a moment he clung there, coughing and panting, his legs in the creek and water streaming down into his face from plastered-down hair. Suddenly he saw the man—a huddled shape, sprawled face down in the slick carpet of pine needles.

Because he knew he hadn't shot him, the young man could only stare at first in dull wonderment. But after that he came clambering out of the water, keeping his gun ready. Dripping wet, he paced forward warily until he was standing directly above the huddled figure, and could see the smear of a blood-drenched shirt.

An exclamation broke from him as he reached up to paw dripping hair out of his eyes. "Just plain passed out! Looks like he's in a right bad way, too!"

The gun lay inches from where a limp, blunt-fingered hand had let it spill. As a precaution he hooked it with a boot toe, kicked it aside. Then, his own gun still clamped in a hard grip, he leaned for a hold on the downed man's shoulder, heaved him over face up.

He was heavy—a big-bodied man, with a face that was bearded and brutish. The flat nose had been broken in some rough-and-tumble fight of long ago. The hair was blue-black, close-cropped to the bullet-shaped skull. And a knife scar glistened silver in the sun. The young man knew that face. He stared, wide-eyed, and a name escaped his cracked lips:

"Mike Reba!"

Not dead—no. But not far from it,

judging from the amount of blood the man had lost. No one could stand to have it drained from him like that, indefinitely. The young man straightened, slowly. He looked at his horse and at the back trail, and then up the rippling course of the stream toward those higher hills. He could not spare any more time; he ought to be in the saddle, even if it meant leaving this hurt man to die.

But Mike Reba! Suddenly to the fugitive it seemed that a rare opportunity had fallen into his hands, if he could make use of it. And, his mind made up, he hesitated no longer.

First he went for his sorrel and led it back into the aspen clump where he tied it in leaf-shadow. A buzzing of flies caught his ear, drew him farther into the brush. There he saw the dead roan, stiff and cold, and the hole the bullet had made in its skull. The roan's foreleg was broken.

"Lost his own bronc and waylaid me for mine!" the blond man grunted. "For that I ought to let him die."

Yet he returned to Mike Reba's prone shape and, with mouth tight from distaste, pulled off the bloody rag of shirt. It was a messy thing. He knew little about gunshot wounds, but he judged the bullet had struck Reba in the side, followed a rib around toward his spine.

A groan from the hurt man jerked his head up. Mike Reba was staring at him from bloodshot, pain-bright eyes.

"Kid!" The word was a hoarse, gasping grunt. "In my pocket—a knife. Cut the bullet out of me!"

"No!" The young man flinched back, horror stricken.

THE HURT man's big hand lifted feebly, tried to grab his arm. "Please! You got to! It's pressin' against the spine. I—I can't stand it. The pain—"

"But I can't." The sweat was on the kid's face. Nausea swept over him. He looked down at his hands. They trembled at the horror of the thing he had been asked to do. But then his jaw clamped, his bearded mouth set hard. He reached, fumbled in the hurt man's pocket and closed his fingers over the horn handle of the knife. . . .

When he finished, Mike Reba lay gasping, hardly conscious, his smoky eyes rolled back until only the whites showed. Shakily, the youth stabbed the bloodstained knifeblade into the dirt to clean it, snapped it shut. He ran a sleeve across his face to swipe away the sweat that trickled down into the beard stubbles. Getting to his feet, he moved dazedly down to the creek and washed the blood from his hands. A leg muscle had cramped under him. He limped as he came back carrying Mike Reba's hat filled with water.

He sloshed some onto the hurt man's face, and as Reba began to rouse, squatted and, supporting him with a hand behind his head, helped Reba to drink. After that, he got out tobacco and rolled a smoke for himself and one for the wounded man.

"Thanks," muttered Reba, weakly, puffing at the cigarette. "A nasty job, but I feel better already. I owe you a lot."

"Yeah, you do," grunted the other, harshly. "Needn't think I went to all this trouble for nothing, Reba!"

The bloodshot eyes narrowed. "You know me?"

"It's the only reason I bothered."

Thick lids veiled the burning stare of the other man's eyes. "You wasted your time then," he muttered. "I don't reckon I'm pulling out of this one. Lost too much blood. I've packed that bullet fifty miles or more: A gent that didn't like me and figured the same way you're doing—" The bloodless lips twisted. "Kid, you forgotten the reward is good either way— alive or dead?"

Color edged into the younger man's face. "I ain't after no money reward!" he snapped. "Wouldn't be in no position to cash in on one, anyhow. It happens I'm on the dodge too!"

The outlaw scowled. "So? Then what do you want with me?"

"I want to join up with you!"

Genuine surprise showed in the pain-tight face. He shook his head. "No! You can forget it, kid! Mike Reba always rides alone. I certainly ain't taking on no slick-ear like you for a partner!"

"I'm joinin' up wth you," the young man repeated, and his jaw was hard. "Once I pull you through this—"

Mike Reba didn't answer that. He lifted a hand, jerked the cigarette from his mouth and stuffed it out in the dirt.

"So you're going on the owlhoot!" he grunted, sourly. "Your first job, I reckon? Who are you, kid?"

"The name is Dave Wall." The young man's voice sounded clipped, tight. "I killed a man down at Harronville. A

crook named Stebbens. He had it coming, though I didn't mean to plug him. He went for his gun."

"What was it? A stickup?"

"Yes! This Stebbens gent sold me a ranch he didn't own. By the time I'd found out the deed was a fake he had cleared out with my money. I trailed him, caught up with him at Harronville."

"Get your money back?"

"There wasn't any chance, not when the shooting started. I had to clear out, with a posse after me. They're still somewhere down the trail."

Mike Reba gave a snort of disgust. "I suppose there were even witnesses!"

"No!" exclaimed Dave Wall, hotly. "I'm not that stupid. Not a soul in Harronville so much as laid eyes on me. But they spotted my horse."

REBA gave him a shrewd glance. "If nobody seen you then, you're in the clear. Don't be a fool, kid! Lie low till your chance comes and then drift back where you came from. Go back to punching cows or whatever you was doing."

"No, thanks! I ain't going through again what I did to get the money that crook stole from me!" Bitterness edged the youngster's voice. "There was a girl. She waited five years while I broke my back earning a stake. She ain't goin' to wait another five!"

"She say so?"

"I never asked her! I'm never going near her again — not empty-handed!" Dave Wall's face twisted angrily. "That wolf, Stebbens, was a respected gent in Harronville. If it's all right for him, it ought to be all right for me. I'm on the back trails now and I'm goin' to stay there till I've got the dinero I need and I'm ready to turn back."

A sneer touched the outlaw's mouth. "Big talk! And easy to make. It all looks pretty simple, I guess, to a young pup like you!"

"Look here! I don't take that kind of talk, even from you, Reba!" Dave Wall's edgy nerves drew him up, one fist clenching as though he would take a swipe at the other man. But he checked himself, and when he spoke again it was in a lower voice: "I never said it was easy. I know it ain't. That's why I aim to tie up with you, with a gent who knows the ropes.

"And I don't think you can put me off! You're helpless—no bronc, a bad hole in you that's still bleeding. But my sorrel is here. I'll get you on him and keep you there if I have to tie you. We'll shake the posse that's after me, and when you can get around again, you're goin' to show your gratitude by teaching me the things I need to know. Is that plain?"

Mike Reba began to curse. "I don't want to saddle myself with a whelp like you and a fool, to boot!" He shrugged. "But you got the gun, and you're callin' the cards, so there's nothing I can do about it. Can't even make you let me lie here and die in peace!"

"You ain't goin' to die!" snapped Dave Wall. He got to his feet. "Come on now, and no argument! We're gettin' out of here before that bunch of manhunters from Harronville overtakes us."

The scar glistened as Reba lifted his head, scowling. "Well, give me a hand, then!" he snarled suddenly. "If that's how it's to be. You got to help me up from here—I'm weak as thunder."

Dave Wall had him by an arm, trying to hoist the outlaw's solid weight. Suddenly Reba slewed around, falling heavily against the young man's legs, and Wall felt the six-gun slipping from his holster. He leaped back with a cry.

"That's better!" said Mike Reba, glaring at Dave Wall over the muzzle of the gun he had captured. "Now just keep back if you dont want a slug through you. Looks like this is the way we started, don't it? I got the gun—and the bronc, too, as soon as I'm ready to ride."

Shaken and surprised, Wall crouched there, facing the outlaw who sat with the weapon leveled. "You tricked me."

"Couldn't have been simpler, either! Shucks, you ain't got brains enough to be my pardner. I told you Mike Reba always rides alone."

But the exertion seemed to have drained strength from the outlaw's bullet-blasted body. He was gasping suddenly for breath, his huge torso laboring. The fist that held the weapon dropped to his thigh and propped there, as he slumped back heavily against a tree trunk.

"I got to—rest a minute before I can ride," he panted. "You! Move over there and—set where I can watch you. And keep away from that gun lying in the grass—"

Dave Wall stood where he was, con-

sternation mounting in him. "No!" he cried. "If you're goin' to take my gun and my horse, then you got to let me go—give me a chance at least to get away on foot."

"No!" Reba shook his head from side to side. "I can't trust you, kid. I'm keeping you in sight until I'm in saddle and plumb ready to ride."

"But I helped you, Reba! And now you'd hold me here until it's too late for me to throw that Harronville crowd! Ain't you got a speck of—"

HIS voice trailed off. For he saw suddenly that Mike Reba's eyes were closed. The hurt man's breathing had a tortured rasp in it now and the blood was trickling from that terrible gash in his side. He looked almost like a dying man. And, with tension leaping inside him, Dave Wall took a slow pace forward, another, hand reaching for that other weapon that glinted sunlight in the pine needles.

"Cut it out!"

He jerked back as though stung. Reba's eyes were open again, watching him; the bloodless, broken-nosed features were tight and so was the grip on the gun.

"I ain't dead yet—not while I got strength enough to snap this hammer. Now, get back!"

Hopelessly, Dave Wall obeyed the menace of the gun. With Reba's wicked eyes watching him he moved back, dropped to the ground and put his shoulders against an aspen bole. Sweat was streaming on his body, although his clothes were clammy and still wet and cold from his plunge into the water. A cold knot had tightened itself inside him. For the last time he tried to talk to this man whose trick had turned the tables:

"Listen to me—"

"Shut up!" snarled Mike Reba, tight lips barely moving.

Stillness came across the world, except for the ripple of the water close beside them, the swaying of treeheads, the rasp of the hurt man's labored breathing. Hopelessness engulfed young Wall. He had tried to do a favor—and because he had tried, the treachery of this owlhooter had doomed him!

All at once a sound came to him on the faint breeze of morning. Hoofbeats, pounding the trail, the jingle of harness and the call of a man's voice. He lurched to his feet and again Mike Reba opened his eyes.

"It's them!" cried Dave Wall. "But they'll get you, too. You've lost your own neck as well as mine."

Reba cocked his ugly head as though listening. By now the sound of the posse was unmistakable, and coming momently closer.

He grunted, "Yeah, guess I better be moving!"

With painful slowness he got his knees under him and then, clinging to the tree trunk, pushed to his feet. He swayed there, a bloody figure, and he snapped hoarsely:

"Get the sorrel, kid. Bring him to me."

Groaning inwardly, Dave Wall turned away with that gun muzzle following him. The horses of the oncoming posse seemed to shake the ground with the beat of hoofs now, to make the colored leaves of the aspens tremble on the still air. He fumbled with the knot, led the sorrel out to where Mike Reba waited.

"All right!" said the outlaw. "Step back!"

When Wall was clear of the horse Reba went toward it, tottering. The sorrel shied at the smell of blood but Reba caught the horn and almost collapsed against the saddle. His knees sagged, dragging the kak heavily down on that side. He hung that way, sweat streaming on his ugly face.

"You'll never make it!" Dave Wall gritted. "You'll never get into the saddle. You've thrown both our lives away."

On his last words, the riders came breaking through the trees. With a desperate sob Wall turned, made a dash and leaned to snag the gun that lay in the pine needles. He came up with it, determined that taking him should cost this crowd from Harronville dearly. He saw them, all around him on lathered broncs — saw the guns in their hands. Then he heard the shouts:

"There's the sorrel!"

"It's *Reba!*"

And Mike Reba's hoarse challenge: "I gave you a long chase, didn't I? But it took the kid to stop me with a bullet."

The sorrel broke away from him then, terrorized by the shouts and the smell of blood. Reba dropped forward to his knees, but there was still life in him.

Life enough to lift his bullet-head with its spiking of shortcropped black hair, to grin hideously at that ring of possemen.

Reba said, "Remember, the kid here earned the reward! The whole five thousand. He looks like a youngster that could use some—honest money!"

He crumpled forward onto his face, but not before his painshot glance crossed Dave Wall's with a kind of wicked humor in it. Staggered, Wall stood there with a gun in his hand—slowly comprehending a dying outlaw's strange and twisted way of repaying—and saving—the man who had risked himself to aid him!

And he knew that, whatever dim trail stretched before the outlaw now, Mike Reba would still be riding it alone.

READ OUR COMPANION

WESTERN MAGAZINES!

GIANT WESTERN

TRIPLE WESTERN

THRILLING RANCH STORIES

POPULAR WESTERN

WEST

RANGE RIDERS WESTERN

THRILLING WESTERN

MASKED RIDER WESTERN

TEXAS RANGERS

RODEO ROMANCES

THE RIO KID WESTERN

•

NOW ON SALE AT ALL STANDS!

Learn

ELECTRICITY

OR RADIO IN THE GREAT

SHOPS OF COYNE

Your Choice of TWO GREAT FIELDS

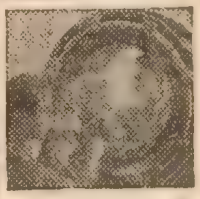
Learn Quickly!

Prepare for the future with ALL-AROUND TRAINING. Come to the SHOPS OF COYNE in Chicago, the school with 49 years of training experience. Two big opportunity fields. Thousands of graduates in Industry.

ELECTRICITY

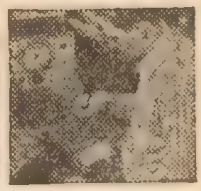
INCLUDING INDUSTRIAL ELECTRONICS

Big future in Power Plant Work, Motors, Armature Winding, Home and Factory Wiring, Appliances, Refrigeration, Maintenance, Illumination, etc. Electricians are in demand everywhere — lifetime job service. Many earn while learning. Send for BIG FREE BOOK on COYNE Training.



RADIO-Television

A great field now, even greater growth ahead. Here at COYNE you're trained for Construction, Testing, Trouble-Shooting on Radio, Public Address, Sound Picture Units, Training includes FM, Photo-cells, Television, etc. Many Coyne Trained men own well-paying radio businesses of their own.



Not a "Home-Study" Course!

You get actual shop work on full-size equipment plus necessary theory. Whether you had previous experience or not makes no difference at Coyne.

NON-VETERANS WHO ARE SHORT OF MONEY can finance most of their tuition and pay it in easy monthly payments after graduation.

Electric Refrigeration

This training means additional opportunities. Training in this field now added to our Electrical or Radio course.

MAIL COUPON FOR FACTS!

See how we make it EASY for you to get ready NOW. Check course you prefer and rush to us for full details, FREE. No obligation—no salesman will call. Do it TODAY.

Approved for G. I. Training

B. W. COOKE, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL and RADIO SCHOOL
Dept. 68-84K
500 S. Paulina St., Chicago 12, Ill.

Send me your BIG FREE BOOK — for the course checked below. Also full details of your Student Finance Plan.

☐ ELECTRICITY ☐ RADIO

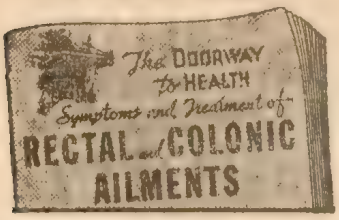
NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY..... STATE.....

Some Causes of Chronic Ailments

FREE BOOK — Explains Dangers Of Related Ailments



Learn the serious nature of Piles, Fistula, Colon, stomach and associated disorders. Write today for a FREE copy of a 40-page illustrated book. Thornton & Minor Clinic, Suite 956, 926 McGee Street, Kansas City, Mo.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

on our capital. Always your own boss. Hundreds average $6,000 to $25,000 annual sales year after year. We supply stocks, equipment on credit. 200 home necessities. Selling experience unnecessary to start. Wonderful opportunity to own pleasant, profitable business backed by world-wide industry. Write RAWLEIGH CO., DEPT. 4-U-TFG, Freeport, Illinois.

Be a DETECTIVE

Learn at Home in Your Spare Time

Be your own boss! Earn good money in this interesting, respected profession. This is a recognized authoritative course of training. Includes crime detection, prevention and identification; shadowing; undercover work, etc. Write for FREE BOOK describing training and opportunities. State Age.

INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM

INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE TRAINING SCHOOL
1701 Monroe St., N. E. Dept. 199A, Washington 18, D. C.

"HOW TO WIN PRIZE CONTESTS"

AMAZING BOOKLET $1.00

WRITE DEPT. 62

"GADGETS," BOX 28, JACKSON HEIGHTS, NEW YORK

WORTH $10. Huge volume enables us to give exceptional value! Fully guaranteed—why pay more? Genuine virgin wool and fine-spun rayon. Cool, comfortable. Twill weave resists wrinkles, holds crease, gives amazing wear. Expert fashion tailored for perfect fit. Zipper front. Roomy pockets. Blue, Tan, Sand, Lt. or Dk. Brown, Blue-Gray. WAIST SIZES: 28-38 $6.95 PR. pleated or 28-44 plain.

SEND NO MONEY! Send name, waist size, color. Pay postman only $6.95 plus small postage. Or, send money and save postage. Money-Back Guarantee!

LINCOLN TAILORS, TF-9, Lincoln, Nebr.

AGENTS WANTED!

Make Sensational Profits! New, sell-on-sight Plastic Line: Tablecloths, Aprons; many other splendid fast-selling items, novelties. Postal brings free details, special deals. No obligation. *Write today. Hurry!*

ROYALTY SALES COMPANY
Box 748 Passaic 38, New Jersey

A LAUGH ON EVERY PAGE OF

CARTOON HUMOR

Featuring America's Funniest Cartoonists

NOW ON SALE—25c AT ALL STANDS!

TRAIL BLAZERS

(Continued from Page 9)

and removed and down logs and large stumps must be pulled away or blasted.

This is slow work, if done by hand and with a single horse. Speedier removal by means of bull-dozer and tractor can generally be contracted for in cut-over areas if you have the wherewithall to pay for it.

Many cut-over land settlers in the Pacific Northwest at first content themselves with removing just the brush and down logs and then pasture the land, or let sheep graze it for several years while they are gradually increasing and clearing their crop producing acreage.

Cut-Over Tracts

The best time to inspect cut-over tracts is not in winter months when there is snow on the ground but rather in the spring or summer. Then you can get a better idea of the general vegetative growth, the possible workability of the land for various crops, and a better insight into the drainage features of different portions of the tract.

It is sometimes possible for a settler to obtain some sort of part time employment to help out with his finances, at least at the start of his project. Work on local road-building, or at nearby logging camps and sawmills for instance. Or possibly at his own special trade, if he has one.

Furthermore quite a few cut-over tracts have enough second growth wood on them to realize some returns for cutting it, and what is just

as important these days enough for using in constructing your own first log cabin home, or barns, sheds and other outbuildings.

It's pioneering. And no easy road to riches. Pioneering never was. But the opportunity is there and so is the land. Raw cut-over timber tracts that can be made into rich, productive farms and ranches. And the West is still a great place to live in and grow up with. Especially when you own a slice of it yourself . . .

See you folks again, next issue. Best of luck!

—CAPTAIN RANGER.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

JIM KEATON, secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, wired Tombstone Jones and Speedy Smith to report to Smoke Tree for further orders. Having sold their horses and saddles in order to get rich on an infallible system for beating roulette wheels that Tombstone dreamed up, and finding said system as fallible if not fallibler than any other they'd

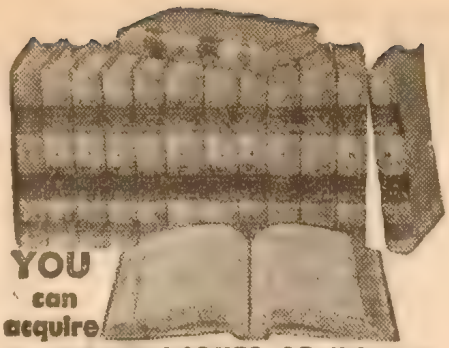
[*Turn page*]

America's Most Entertaining Picture Magazine!

Packed with Fascinating Photo Features!

•

NOW ON SALE—15c AT ALL STANDS!



YOU can acquire

LAW NIGHTS AT HOME! L.L.B. DEGREE

LaSalle's famous Law Library—used as reference in many Law libraries and Law offices—has enabled thousands to master Law surprisingly fast, in spare hours at home, for business and professional advancement.

These 14 remarkable volumes, compiled by leading professors and lawyers, cover the whole basic field of Law in condensed, orderly, simplified manner.

You advance rapidly with this great library; plus special lectures furnished. We guide you step-by-step with personalized Problem Method of instruction . . . you *learn by doing*—handling legal problems—not by memorizing rules.

Send for two FREE 48-page booklets, "Law Training for Leadership," and "Evidence," answering questions about Law and its value to you, and telling how LaSalle Law graduates are winning rapid advancement in business and public life. Mail coupon below. No obligation.

LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A Correspondence Institution
417 S. Dearborn St. Dept. 9329-L Chicago 5, Ill.

Send me your two FREE booklets described above without obligation.

Name..... Age.....

Street.....

City, Zone & State.....

BE A DETECTIVE

WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE. Write to GEO. R. H. WAGNER, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.

RAISE HAMSTERS

The new wonder animals from Syria. Often called Toy Bears. Delightful pets. Everyone wants them. Laboratories need thousands. Clean, odorless. Raise anywhere. A profitable and interesting hobby or business. We furnish breeders and instructions. Write today for free book.

GULF HAMSTERY, 1537 BASIL ST., MOBILE, ALA.

PULVEX FLEA POWDER

TWO KINDS

WITH 5% DDT . . . for dogs. Kills fleas and lice quick. Keeps fleas off 5-7 days. Many home uses.

OR WITH ROTENONE . . . for cats, dogs. Quickly kills fleas, lice. Kills fleas when put on a single spot. Pre-war formula.

EITHER KIND: 25c & 50c

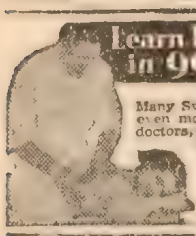
What To Do For Pains of ARTHRITIS Try This Free

If you have never used "Rosse Tabs" for pains or arthritis, neuritis, rheumatism, we want you to try them at our risk. We will send you a full-size package from which you are to use 24 Tabs FREE. If not astonished at the palliative relief which you enjoy from your sufferings, return the package and you owe us nothing. We mean it! SEND NO MONEY. Just send name and address and we will rush your Tabs by return mail.

ROSSE PRODUCTS CO., Dept. 291

2708 Farwell Avenue • Chicago 45, Illinois

LAW STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 39 years expert instruction—over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK NOW!
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 93-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.



Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

MEN AND WOMEN, 18 to 50

Many Swedish Massage graduates make $50, $75 or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanitoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for Diploma. Anatomy Charts and 32-page Illustrated Book FREE—Now!
THE COLLEGE OF SWEDISH MASSAGE
Dept. 663L, 100 E. Ohio St., Chicago 11

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

35 Years in Business
300,000 Satisfied Customers
THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.

FREE BOOK

RUPTURE!

An amazing Air-Cushion Invention allows body freedom at work or play. Light, neat, cool, sanitary. Durable, cheap. Day and night protection helps Nature support weakened muscles gently but surely. No risk. Sent on Trial! Write NOW for free Booklet and Proof of Results. All correspondence confidential.
Brooks Company, 183-B State St., Marshall, Mich.

1¢ A Penny May Bring You HAPPINESS!

Would you gamble a penny to win Happiness, Companionship, Love, Financial Success, through the help of a mysterious International Secret Organization? Then just send name and address on a post-card TODAY for your FREE Copy of great Book "Mayan Mysteries". It can change your whole life! Address Rose Dawn, The Mayan order, Dept. 586, P. O. Box 2710, San Antonio, Tex.

Suffer Varicose LEG SORES?

IF you suffer pain and misery of Varicose Ulcers, or Open Leg Sores, send away at once for FREE Booklet "THE LIEPE METHODS FOR HOME USE." Tells all about this 40-year-old method, praised and endorsed by thousands. Liepe Methods, Dept. 33-J 2204 N. Green Bay Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

ever tried, the boys were forced to hop a blind baggage for Smoke Tree.

The train lurched ahead from the water stop, rapidly gaining speed, and Tombstone and Speedy hadn't had time to get comfortably horizontal, when it came to a sudden and jolting stop.

"Prob'ly a cow on the track," said Tombstone.

"The engineer didn't whistle."

"Maybe he didn't see her in time."

For some little while then the only sound was the panting of the engine ahead of them in the night. Then they heard voices and both hunched low, trying to avoid being seen by anyone on the opposite side of the train. A shot sounded suddenly and a man yelled:

"Stay where yuh are, you fool!"

"What's goin' on?" Tombstone whispered anxiously.

"Maybe it's a train robbery," Speedy said.

"Yeah, maybe. I'm goin' to see what—"

Tombstone raised to his feet just as two men came over the other side, traveling fast. There was no chance to avoid a collision. Speedy tried to straighten up and only added to the generally disastrous results. They were both knocked off the steps and all four men went into a pile against the rocky wall bordering the track at this spot.

Tombstone bumped his head sharply and Speedy tried to kick himself loose from the dog-pile. One man was cursing, flailing with both hands, while the other got loose and went out of there, running past the engine, but limping badly.

Then the other man, apparently realizing his position, went out of there like a frightened coyote, leaving Tombstone and Speedy dazed, bruised, and wondering what had happened. The locomotive whistle cut loose a terrific blast and the engine began backing, wheels spinning. It went past Tombstone and Speedy, rather leaving them in a cloud of steam.

Tombstone was on his feet, holding a large canvas sack in both hands as the departing headlight picked them up beside the track. Speedy was going around in circles, looking for his hat, which he found and put on. It went down over his eyes and he cuffed it back.

"Lovely dove!" he blurted. "I hit so hard I shrunk my head! What you got there, Tombstone?"

"I—I dunno," faltered the dazed Tombstone. "Huh! A sack! Where'd I get me a sack? Man, I've got me a lump on my head! What happened?"

"Two men hit us," said Speedy painfully. "Look at me! My hat is two-three sizes too

big! I've done shrunk. Wait! By golly, I must have traded hats with one of 'em!"

Tombstone lighted a match and looked at Speedy. "I hope yuh got somethin' to boot. Yore's was almost new."

"Wait a minute! We didn't have no sack, Tombstone. Wait'll I light a match."

Speedy lighted a match and Tombstone shoved a long arm and hand down into the canvas sack, bringing his hand out quickly, clutching a handful of currency, still banded. They both stared at it for a moment or two, and then the fingers relaxed and the money fell back into the bag. The match flickered out, and they stood there, silent.

Far away a coyote's wailing broke the stillness.

"They robbed the train and we got the money!" Speedy said then, huskily.

"Yeah, we got the money," muttered Tombstone. "And judgin' from the weight of it, we're richer'n Illinois mud."

"But it ain't our money, Tombstone. It ain't our—sa-a-ay! If they catch us with that money . . ."

"Mebbe they'd give us a reward, huh?"

"Yeah—thirty years at hard labor. We got to get rid of it, Tombstone, and fast!"

Which is just the first of a lot of hot water the boys muddle into in the hilariously funny novelet, LOVABLE LIARS, by W. C. Tuttle, featured in the next issue of EXCITING WESTERN. Take heed, you Tombstone and Speedy fans. This is one you'll not want to miss.

Also in the next issue, a second big novelet, WASHED IN BLOOD, by A. Leslie, will make its appearance. In this gripping story, a young and lanky cowboy named Jim Wayne is forced into a shoot-out by three members of the powerful Harlow clan who virtually ruled that section of Texas. What follows, with Wayne fighting clear of this jackpot only to find he was wanted for murder in this land where seemingly every hand was turned against him, makes some of the most exciting reading you'll find north, south, east, or west of the Pecos.

A third full-length novelet, RANGER OUT OF BOUNDS, pits the cunning and gun-skill of that most celebrated of Arizona Rangers, Navajo Raine, against a shrewd and brutal gang of land sharks to whom murder, deceit, and even the abduction and ill treatment of a beautiful girl were merely moves in the game they played to win. By Jackson Cole, this grand yarn will keep you in a state of high suspense all the way.

[*Turn page*]

CRACKS, ITCHING between TOES?

Help Yourself to Quick Relief with QUINSANA —Amazing Results on Athlete's Foot!

Tests prove that 9 out of 10 get complete relief from itching, burning Athlete's Foot after 30-day Quinsana treatment.

Quinsana's *antiseptic* action helps prevent the growth of the fungi that cause Athlete's Foot. It works fast to end the misery of itching, cracking, peeling between toes. And daily Quinsana use helps prevent recurrence of Athlete's Foot!

Relieve burning tired feet! Soothing, cooling Quinsana Foot Powder helps keep feet dry, comfortable. It aids in absorbing excessive perspiration. Quinsana helps combat foot odor.

Shake Quinsana on your feet. Shake it in shoes to absorb moisture. Use Quinsana every day.

MENNEN QUINSANA FOOT POWDER

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H658, Drexel, at 58th, Chicago 37

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Secure "Patent Guide" together with "Record of Invention" form—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
88-G District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

SEND FOR THIS FREE!

Make money. Know how to break and train horses. *Write today for this book FREE*, together with special offer of a course in Animal Breeding. If you are interested in Gaiting and Riding the saddle horse, check here ( ) *Do it today—now.*

BEERY SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP
Dept. 829 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

You Can Learn to Be an ARTIST

Trained Artists Are Capable of Earning $40, $60, $75 Weekly. Many of our graduates are now enjoying successful Art careers. By our practical method, famous since 1914, we teach you Commercial Art, Cartooning and Designing AT HOME IN YOUR SPARE TIME. Write for details in FREE BOOK. "Art for Pleasure and Profit." explains course and commercial opportunities in art. TWO ARTISTS' OUTFITS furnished. STATE AGE. G.I. APPROVED

STUDIO 669M WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART
1115-15th Street, N. W. Washington 5, D. C.

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO.
959-B FRONTIER BLDG.
462 NIAGARA STREET BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

When PRAYER FAILS

The prayers of the most worthy people often fail. Why? The unworthy often have the greatest health, success, riches and happiness. The best, smartest, and most industrious people often have only pain, poverty and sorrow. Why? Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman found the answers to these questions. His eyes were opened by the strangest mystic he met during his twenty-one years of travels in the Far East. Sick then, he regained health. Poor then, he acquired wealth and world-wide professional honors. He wants to tell the whole world what he learned, and offers to send a 9,000-word treatise, FREE, to everyone who asks promptly. It is a first step to the POWER that KNOWLEDGE gives. There is no obligation. Write for YOUR FREE COPY today.

INSTITUTE of MENTALPHYSICS, Dept. 280-G
213 South Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles 4, Calif.

Learn BAKING At Home

Baking is one of America's high industries in wages. Nearly depression-proof. Thorough basic home course lays sound foundation. If you have aptitude, write for FREE BOOKLET, "Opportunities in Commercial Baking."
National Baking School, 1315 Mich. Ave., Dept. 1806, Chicago 5

LOSING YOUR HAIR?

Have Dandruff? Annoying itchy scalp? Dull, lifeless-looking hair or thin fuzz and want thick, healthy hair? We may solve your problem easily and inexpensively, in the privacy of your own home. We are helping many people and may help you, too. For FREE BOOKLET write today.

THE MODERN SYSTEM, INC.
3220 Hudson Blvd. Dept. K Jersey City, N. J.

GET ZIPPER SHOES . . . Don't Pay a Cent!

Earn Big Money in Spare Time, Too

Act at once to receive exclusive sensationally popular Zipper Shoes for personal wear, just for showing our great line of over 200 fast-selling Shoe Styles to friends, and taking a few orders. Big Cash Profits for easy, pleasant work in your spare or full time. Send post card NOW for FREE Sample Outfit, Tested Sales Plans, and Personal Shoe Offer.

FREE Sample Outfit

VICTOR THOMAS SHOE CO.
Dept. V-161
Chippewa Falls, Wis.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 39 years expert instruction—over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK NOW!
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 93-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

FREE ENLARGEMENT of your Favorite Photo

FROM FAMOUS HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS

Just to get acquainted we will make a beautiful 5 x 7 enlargement of any picture or negative. Be sure to include color of hair, eyes and clothing and get our bargain offer for having your enlargement beautifully hand colored in oil and mounted in your choice of handsome frames. Please enclose 10c and your original picture or negative will be returned with the free 5 x 7 enlargement postpaid. Act now! Limit 2 to a customer.

HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS
7021 Santa Monica Blvd., Dept. 459, Hollywood, Calif.

The usual collection of swiftly-paced, bullet-studded short stories, as well as the regular departments, will of course be included in that next big issue of the magazine. So, if it's top entertainment in Western fiction you go for, look forward to the next issue of EXCITING WESTERN.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HERE we are again—back in that department where you, the reader, gets a chance to speak his mind. And if you aren't among those speaking it below, or if you haven't already spoken it, we'd very much like to hear what you think of the stories you've been reading in EXCITING WESTERN. No foolin'.

Now to a few excerpts from some of the many grand letters in the old mailbag:

Tombstone and Speedy take the cake. They're the two funniest, most appealing characters in contemporary fiction for my money and I'll argue the point with any and all comers. You could devote the entire magazine to them and you wouldn't make me mad, even though I do think some of the other stories you run are fair to middlin'. Anyway, here's one reader you can count on to do his part at the newsstands without fail.—*Carl Demming, Atlanta, Ga.*

Thankee kindly, Carl. And as for arguin' the point, we can't, on account of we see eye to eye with you where Tombstone and Speedy are concerned.

I've always thought EXCITING WESTERN a good magazine, but in the past few issues it seems to have become even better. I particularly enjoyed the January issue, in which I liked best THE COWBOY HAD A WORD FOR IT, by Chuck Stanley, MAN-BAIT FOR A GUN TRAP, by T. W. Wood, POWDER ON THE PECOS, by Hal White, and POWERFUL HOMBRE, by Tex Mumford. Wishing you continued success with your fine magazine.—*Randall McCarthy, Halifax, Nova Scotia.*

Mighty nice to hear from you folks up north of the Border. Here's another from up Canada way:

I enjoy EXCITING WESTERN very much, especially stories by Johnston McCulley, T. W. Ford, and Leo Charles, all three of whom were represented in your January issue. I'd like to see many more of them in the coming issues.—*Charles Simoneau, St. Joseph de Soul, Canada.*

Thanks, Charlie. We've got some lined up by the authors you mention, so keep a-readin'.

I have been reading EXCITING WESTERN for quite a while, and as long as you keep running a Tombstone and Speedy story in each issue, you can bet I'll be reading it for quite a while to come. I like Navajo Raine, too, and think the

story in the May issue in which he appeared, A RANGER TO RECKON WITH, was especially good. Jackson Cole, the author of the Raine stories, is hard to beat, but W. C. Tuttle does it by a small margin, I think. Keep the good stories coming.—*Alta Stewart, Leitchfield, Ky.*

Both your favorites coming up again in the next issue, Alta, and both better than usual, too, we think.

EXCITING WESTERN is pretty good as a whole and I always find myself coming back for more every time I see a new one on the stands. But if the Tombstone Jones and Speedy Smith stories are funny, then I'm a ringtailed orangutan! More drama and less alleged humor, please.—*John Silvestro, San Francisco, Calif.*

You looked in the mirror lately, John? All kidding aside, though, we're as happy to have your opinion as anyone else's. It shows us that we have to keep our books balanced to please everyone.

I just discovered your magazine a few months ago, and those superfunny characters, Tombstone and Speedy. Now I keep looking for a new issue every time I pass a magazine rack. Why don't you come out twice as often?—*Orrin Quill, Corpus Christi, Texas.*

Much obliged for your kind words, Orrin, and maybe we will. And maybe not. Who knows?

That's all the space we have for this time, folks, so hang and rattle till we meet in the next issue, will you? Meantime, drop us a line. A letter or postcard will do, and simply address it to The Editor, EXCITING WESTERN, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. *Adios.*

—THE EDITOR.

Answers to Western Quiz

On Page 61

1. Hands. Four inches make a hand.
2. Stolen cattle.
3. Fighting in the Battle of The Alamo.
4. Will James.
5. Because of its reddish colored water. Colorado means red in Spanish.
6. It was the hand held by Wild Bill Hickok when he was shot to death.

What to do for PIMPLES OR SKIN RASH

Ordinary pimples or skin rash, when due to external causes, can make the most beautiful girl look ugly. But don't reach for any "quick-cure" salve to get rid of them. Try HOBSON'S DERMA-ZEMA OINTMENT at once. HOBSON'S DERMA-ZEMA OINTMENT has been famous for 50 years in helping relieve and remove ugly, unsightly pimples and skin rash. Just wash face and affected parts with ordinary toilet soap—then apply HOBSON'S DERMA-ZEMA OINTMENT. HOBSON'S starts to help clear up and remove those unsightly red pimples and skin rash (if due to external causes) immediately. But be sure to ask your drug or department store for HOBSON'S DERMA-ZEMA OINTMENT today. Don't just ask for DERMA-ZEMA. Insist on the genuine HOBSON'S DERMA-ZEMA OINTMENT by name and get what you ask for—59c.

CARBURETOR TOO RICH

MAKES MOTORIST TOO POOR

Car owners who are wasting money and not getting proper gas mileage due to over-rich mixtures will be pleased to learn how to save gasoline by VACU-MATING over-rich mixtures. VACU-MATIC fits all cars, trucks and tractors. It is *automatic* and operates on the supercharge principle. Easily installed in a few minutes.

SALESMEN WANTED! Big Profits! Send name, address on penny postcard for *free particulars* and how to get yours for introducing.

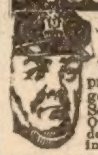
VACU-MATIC CO., 7617-1352 W. State St., WAUWATOSA, WIS.

OLD LEG TROUBLE

Easy to use Viscose Home Method. Heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for trial if it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe your trouble and get a FREE BOOK.

T. G. VISCOSE COMPANY
140 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago 2, Illinois

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"



Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific

CRIME DETECTION!

We have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let us teach you **in your own home.** Learn Finger Printing, Firearms Indentification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. Over 800 of all American Bureaus of Identification employ I. A. S. students or graduates. We can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time. Write today, stating age, for "Blue Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 9966, Chicago 40, Ill.

BE A *Nurse*

MAKE $30-$40 A WEEK

Practical nurses are needed in every community...doctors rely on them... patients appreciate their cheerful, expert care. You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. 49th yr. Earn while learning. High School not required. Men, women, 18 to 60. Trial plan. Write now!

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 428, 100 East Ohio Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send free booklet, and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name.....
City.....*State*.....*Age*.....

WILD TO AVENGE HIS FATHER'S DEATH

A Stalwart Texan Rides into an Ambush

THEY surged across the wilderness to stake out claims in the new Dakota ranges. With their goal almost in sight the crooked San Saba betrayed the outfit and murdered its leader. And as young Tom Gillette prepared for his grim, revengeful manhunt, he faced an ambush of death. Swift action and thrills a-plenty cram the pages of "Free Grass," an adventure-packed novel by Ernest Haycox.

Don't miss this Popular Library reprint of a best-seller by one of the top Western writers of our time. Check the list below for other good reading, too. Page for page, word for word, they're the same books that sold in the original editions for $2.00 or more.

POPULAR LIBRARY WESTERNS

- 143 FREE GRASS, by *Ernest Haycox*
- 127 PARADISE TRAIL, *by William Byron Mowery*
- 135 LAW RIDES THE RANGE, *By Walt Coburn*
- 146 HOPALONG CASSIDY TAKES CARDS, *by C. E. Mulford*
- 141 WINTER RANGE, *by Alan LeMay*
- 140 SECRET VALLEY, *by Jackson Gregory*
- 145 GUNSMOKE TRAIL, *by William MacLeod Raine*
- 142 GUARDIANS OF THE DESERT, *by Tom Gill*

- *Unabridged volumes — not condensations*
- *Famous titles from the best-seller lists*
- *Published originally at $2 or more a copy*

ORDER BY NUMBER
MAIL COUPON TODAY!

Popular Library, Inc., Dept. TFG9
10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y.

Send me postpaid the Popular Library books I have circled. I enclose 25c (in coins or in U. S. stamps of small denominations) per copy. (NOTE: We pay postage on orders for 4 books or more. If ordering less than 4 books, please enclose 5c per book extra for postage.)

91	127	141	145
94	135	142	146
102	140	143	150

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY & ZONE.....STATE.....

POPULAR LIBRARY *Specials*

- 150 CROSSWORD PUZZLES, *Book Two*
- 102 DUEL IN THE SUN, *by Niven Busch*
- 94 THE MORTAL STORM, *by Phyllis Bottome*
- 91 THE SEA-HAWK, *by Rafael Sabatini*

Amazing Discovery Makes Seat Covers Fit Smooth Without Expensive Installation

DE LUXE QUALITY

Scotch Plaid

Genuine Fibre

Auto SEAT COVERS

A SOLID BACK
For 4-door Sedan.

B DIVIDED BACK SOLID SEAT
For Coupe or Coach front.

C INDIVIDUAL SEATS
For divided back and seat.

CHOICE OF FRONT SEAT STYLE

Simple to Order

Now it's no longer necessary to pay fancy prices for long-wearing fibre seat covers because of expensive installation! Just fill out the coupon indicating front seat type illustrated on left. They slip on easily . . . you can install in a few minutes. Perfect fit guaranteed or money back on our 10-day inspection plan. Mail the coupon today. Set of 3 Car Initials given at no extra cost.

FOR COUPES and All Front Seats $3.98

Fits most Cars!

Sedans and Coaches COMPLETE SET Front and Back Seat $7.98

SPECIAL

DISTRIBUTED DIRECT
BY MAIL OFFER SAVES MONEY
***EXCLUSIVE!* Not Sold Elsewhere!**

Cool and comfortable, colorful, long-wearing seat covers that stay clean . . . sleek, genuine fibre surfaces are lacquer-coated to resist dust, dirt and to make them water repellent. Tailored for snug, smooth fit with double stitched seams and artificial leather trim for extra long wear. Fit most cars, including 1948 models. Yes, these bright, sparkling Scotch Plaid Fibre Seat Covers make old cars look new and keep new cars new-looking as they protect clothing and keep upholstery new-looking for higher trade-in value. Special . . . 3 initials for car door included without extra cost. Mail coupon today!

At last you can enjoy the comfortable coolness and handsome appearance of beautiful automobile seat covers, expertly tailored of genuine Scotch Plaid Fibre, without paying fancy prices! An amazing discovery, elasticized slip-over sides, now insures snug, smooth fit without expensive installation costs. Over 100,000 satisfied users can't be wrong! These wonderful, colorful seat covers slip on in a jiffy . . . anyone can easily install in just a few minutes! Often gives your car greater trade-in value. Yes, for a better-looking car, for cooler and more comfortable driving, get brand-new seat covers for your car while this new bargain introductory price is yours for the taking. Mail the coupon today. Supply is limited.

SEND NO MONEY . . .

10 DAY HOME INSPECTION OFFER

The NEW EASY SLIP OVER STYLE
Anyone Can Now Put On in Only a Few Minutes . . .

If you need new automobile seat covers, either for front seat alone or for front and back seats, mail your order today. We fit most makes and model cars, including 1948 models. Fill out and mail the coupon . . . on arrival pay only $3.98 for front seat or $7.98 for complete sets of front and back seats, plus C.O.D. postage. Do this on our home inspection offer . . . if not delighted, return covers in 10 days, and we will refund your money. But don't wait. This introductory offer can't go on forever. Fill out the coupon and mail today.

AMERICAN MERCHANDISING COMPANY,
Dept. SC-140
9 Madison Ave., Montgomery 4, Ala.

SPECIAL! Set of 3 car initials INCLUDED WITHOUT EXTRA COST

Simple to permanently mount, these chrome plate metal initials glamorize every car. State 3 initials you want. Kit comes complete ready to use, entirely without extra cost. Mail coupon today.

RMS

MAIL COUPON

AMERICAN MERCHANDISING CO.,
Dept. SC-140
9 Madison Ave., Montgomery 4, Ala.

Please send me the DeLuxe Seat Covers for car checked (below:

Make..... Model..... Year.....

FRONT SEAT TYPE: A..... B..... C.....

CHECK ONE ☐ I am enclosing $..... in full payment. Send Postpaid.
☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman $..... plus postage.

NAME.....
ADDRESS.....
CITY..... ZONE..... STATE.....

$7.98 for Complete Set

Also include CAR INITIAL Kit of 3 initials and liquid adhesive for permanent mounting in 10 seconds. Send these 3 initials: Print Plainly. ☐ ☐ ☐

"He's added another choice item to his collection!"

Choicest item in *any* man's liquor cabinet—that familiar amber decanter of Calvert Reserve! For here, in this fine whiskey, you'll find the superb result of Calvert's unequalled blending experience...a whiskey you'll prefer because it's smoother, mellower, tastes better. Try it, and you, too, will switch to Calvert!

Clear Heads Choose **Calvert**

CALVERT RESERVE, Choice Blended Whiskey...86.8 Proof...65% Grain Neutral Spirits
Calvert Distillers Corporation, New York City